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The search for a "richer literacy": an autobiographical approach to educational research

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The search for a "richer literacy": an autobiographical approach to educational research

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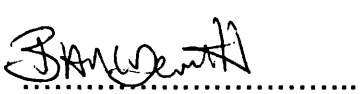

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For *Damien.*

Dialogic companion *par excellence*

(Where appropriate, all names in this dissertation have been changed to preserve confidentiality)

Acknowledgement:

Extracts from G. Richardson and W. Fletcher, *Histoires Illustrées: Free Composition in French,* illustrated by Barbara M. Jowett (Edward Arnold, 1951), reproduced by permission of Hodder Arnold.

Contents

Ed.D. dissertation abstract

The search for a "richer literacy":

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The genesis of this enquiry is to be found in an awakened/ awakening fascination with the nature of the research process itself, fuelled by the same yearning, expressed by Lawrence Stenhouse thirty years ago, for a "richer literacy" of pedagogical research. My chosen vehicle is a reflective biography whose illocutionary force will be a foregrounding, for dialectic purposes, of the "corpus of professional understandings and craft knowledge that derives from experience" (Thomas, 1995).
The critical, reflexive nature of the enquiry allows me to situate myself within a social constructionist paradigm; I will invoke post-structuralist and feminist perspectives and offer insights from discursive psychologists in support of my approach. Since a central tenet of the discursive school is that psychological phenomena, including acts of remembering, are largely fluid and indeterminate, part of my task as a story-teller must be to seek to authenticate my indeterminate rememberings, to render them normatively accountable.
The outcome of my research will be a text jointly crafted in conversation with my reader(s), actual and potential.

.....

Preamble

Everyone has a view on education. When it comes to the disciplines of medicine or the law, most people appear content to leave it to "the professionals"; not so in education. Everyone wants to have their say on what does/ should go on in our schools. We all have a vested interest in education, or at least in the manifestation which is our concern here - schooling. Capitalising on this popular appeal, the 1997 Blair government was elected to power on a platform of "education, education, education", promising to review our curricula, revive our declining standards, re-invigorate our flagging teachers. Education thus becomes little more than a power game in which teachers can feel themselves to be pawns in the political rhetoric, consulted rarely, and castigated regularly when things do not go according to plan. I am reminded of a story told by a friend of Polish origin. This friend, Jutta, had been listening since infancy to stories of the intellectual, academic family her mother had left behind in Poland when she came to the UK as a young bride after World War II. Tales of learned uncles and bookish aunts had been held up to her as a model from early childhood on. When, one day, visiting Poland for the first time as a young teacher, Jutta was introduced into this revered family, she was dismayed to find their only topic of conversation seemed to be "supplies". They gloated over the gifts of food and clothing Jutta had brought them, and spent all their days either talking about, or queuing for, goods in short supply - oranges were to be found one day in a market in such and such a place, a

friend had told of a butcher's shop with a supply of fresh sausages, and, if you got there early enough, **two** loaves were to be had at one of the bakeries where they had managed to procure some contraband flour.

Jutta presented this story as evidence of the strategy of a government intent on keeping people's minds on everyday concerns, and off the failures of the contemporary political system. Operating constantly at the basic levels in the Maslowian hierarchy of needs left no time for reflection, no time for discussion.

I recall Jutta's anecdote here to remind us of our duty as teachers to keep focused on the main task, viz. the education of our young people. Anything else is at best contiguous. This means, for example, that the tests and credentials privileged by politicians and other "stakeholders" should not be seen as obsessions distracting us from our central concern, viz. the action and inter-action of the classroom, the dynamics which ensure that meaningful, formative activity, personal and social enhancement - in short education - is taking place. It means too that teachers need to assert their position not just at the micro-level of classroom practice but in the meta-sphere of philosophical and methodological debate.

Increasingly, demands placed upon teachers by what I have called "contiguities" leave little time for discussion at any level; issues of accountability, promotion, even survival within the system, leave little

space for essential professional development at the deepest level. While conferences and workshops on leadership, management, methodology, IT nurture the requirements of the ambitious technician, there is little space for reflection, and few opportunities for questioning, individually and collectively, the assumptions which ground our professional activities. Without this, institutional demands threaten to undermine the whole enterprise, by obliging us to "deviate (....) from our historical models and ..... shed concern for truth and truth-telling", which Peters (2001), tracing a path from Foucault back to Socrates, sees as the crucial link between education and philosophy, the very basis of Western philosophical and educational practice.

The present dissertation is an attempt to redress the balance for this teacher-researcher. In asserting the primacy of dialectic over rhetoric, it states, in the tradition of Dewey, Freire, Giroux, a clear preference for a dialogic, democratic approach to education and educational research. Education is embraced as "a pedagogy of knowing" with the teacher "a knowing subject, face to face with other knowing subjects" and engaged in constant dialogue, "the seal of the act of knowing". Freire views education as a process of *conscientization* through which people learn to read the world as well as the word, giving them a voice previously silenced (Freire, in Maybin, 1994: 259). The learning experience then is one of empowerment. As both teacher and learner in the story which follows, I will seek, in the light of experience and reflective practice, to demonstrate that such empowerment resides in

the negotiation of conflicting forces and constraints, and further, that the most fertile nurturing ground for such a pedagogy is at the interface of conflicting ideologies and worldviews.

The chosen vehicle for the dialectic which follows is the professional or intellectual biography. It is my belief that in the unfolding of my story certain motifs will emerge which shed light on the language lover, language teacher, language researcher I have become. These will reflect a view of education and educational research which will be reviewed and interpreted, not just by me, but by my readers, in the light of their own philosophical stance. If I make much of the cyclical, hermeneutic nature of this process it is because I see this means of engaging with the "other" as a consensual rather than a conflictive approach to research, and one likely to yield fruitful results. I would stress here that while promoting a consensual approach, I do not see consensuality as a realistic goal of the research process. Rather, like Foucault, I view as somewhat Utopian, the idea that "there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint, and without coercive effects". Indeed it is the very tensions released by competitors in the "game of truth" which allows for the development of the individual, of society and of the process of education. Relations of power being always present our position must be not "for consensuality" but rather "against nonconsensuality" (in McNay, 1994: 125).

I share too the view of Freeman, in Brockmeier and Carbaugh, (eds) (2001: 287), that "*my story* can never wholly be mine alone because I define and articulate my existence with and among others through the various narrative models .... my culture provides". Nor can its subject matter be ever wholly me, because, polyvocality notwithstanding, this biography will leave untold so many parts, vital parts, of my story. Aspects of my biography chosen for my reflections will be of necessity selective and interpretive. My self as a wife, as a mother, my spiritual and political selves will be revealed only in so far as they relate to my present purpose.

My dissertation then is an exercise in both truth-telling and truth-seeking. It finds its whole raison d'être in dialogue – a dialogue between the various multi-situated selves which find expression in these pages, but also, and principally, between these textual selves and the reader. Throughout, the reader will be invited to a critical engagement with the discourse (the thoughts and actions) of the writer. It will depend for its validation on the coherence of the text itself, the sincerity of the researcher, the communicative competence of the writer. If the discourse finds resonance with other researchers and practitioners, thus adding to the knowledge base or, my preferred term (adopted from Thomas: 1995), "corpus of understandings", underlying our practice as teachers, my task will have been worthwhile.

.....

Introduction

Autobiography as educational research: the search for a richer literacy

A social constructionist perspective

As long ago as 1981, Lawrence Stenhouse signalled the need for a more appropriate methodology of educational research, one less reliant on the traditions of the social sciences.

> *To apply social science to teaching most often requires a translation and one difficult enough for social researchers to yearn for a richer literacy of the consumer.*
> (in Rudduck J. and D. Hopkins (eds) 1985:31)

Stenhouse sought the development of a theory relating directly to the practice of education: "Not a sociology, nor a psychology; but a pedagogy". Scott and Usher too (1999:1) fear that emphasising techniques transferred somewhat uncritically from the social sciences can lead too easily to a "trivialisation and technisisation " of educational research.

> *Since educational research must of necessity be social in its orientation, it cannot entirely dissociate itself from the discourse of social research. However, this does not imply that it should be trapped in the latter's often sterile dichotomies and questionable paradigms. There is a need...to look anew at educational research paradigms and the epistemological contexts of educational research. This position, while recognising the contiguity of educational research and educational practice, does not commit educationalists to technisising research. While accepting the need for educational researchers to possess appropriate research skills, there is also a need for educational practitioners to become critical "readers" and "writers" of research.*

In his 1983 publication "Authority, Education and Emancipation", Stenhouse pointed the way to what Nunan (1993:41) has called an "inside-out approach" to research in education. For Stenhouse,

> *(Educational) enquiry should...be rooted in acutely felt curiosity, and research suffers when it is not. Such enquiry becomes systematic when it is structured over time by continuities lodged in the intellectual biography of the researcher and coordinated with the work of others through the cumulative capacity of the organization of the disciplines or the subject.*
> (Rudduck and Hopkins, op.cit: 120)

In the twenty years that have passed since Stenhouse wrote these words, the social sciences themselves have seen a significant shift. Post-modern perspectives (feminism, post-colonialism, contextualism) have altered profoundly the study of sociology. The discipline of psychology too, which for a long time clung tenaciously to its privileged position as a perceived "hard science" has been revolutionised, firstly by the rise of the cognitive school and more recently by a discursive turn, what Harré and Gillett (1994) term "the second cognitive revolution". Linguistics has seen a blossoming of branches such as psycho-linguistics, socio-linguistics and, of particular interest to this researcher, social and critical discourse analysis. Education likewise has felt these "winds of change". Some view with suspicion epistemologies which they see as legitimising levity and promiscuity. Others perceive a threat to the credibility of the educational research enterprise itself. I stand firmly with those who welcome the exciting new possibilities offered by post-modern perspectives. I affirm their rebuttal of the "sterile dichotomies and questionable paradigms" of much traditional research and their refusal to privilege one group, one tradition, one methodology over another. I welcome the opening up of the context of educational research, the

breaching of boundaries, the blurring of distinctions between teacher and researcher, researcher and researched, research and practice. I acknowledge the contributions of the action research paradigm which, in its foregrounding of reflexivity, involves its practitioners in a constant shifting back and forth between research and practice. I applaud the willingness of latter day researchers to experiment, to take risks, to explore and re-explore the rich texture of the educational context. If no research paradigm is above critique, then, conversely, every approach is worthy of consideration.

Experiences described in the autobiography which follow bear witness to a growing awareness on my part of the situated, constructed nature of belief systems, of the need constantly to re-negotiate our world view as we engage with others who see things differently. I set myself in the camp of social constructionists such as Burr, 1995, Williams and Burden, 1997, Gergen, 1999, accepting what Burr (op.cit) cites as "things you would absolutely have to believe in to be a social constructionist". This credo comprises the following:

- "a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge"
- "historical and cultural specificity"
- "knowledge is sustained by social processes" (sic)
- "knowledge and social action go together" (sic)

I share what I see as a healthy scepticism towards world views which claim to have "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth". On a personal level I have little difficulty in tolerating multiple perspectives from within a faith community whose discourse affirms

ownership of "The Way, The Truth and The Life". Such tolerance does not require a rejection of the discourse, but rather a constant examination and re-examination of a "text" which serves as the cornerstone of the lives of so many throughout the world. [1]. I trust that were I a Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist ..... my stance would be the same. All ontologies are culturally and historically situated. Individual perspectives are largely dependent upon where we live and when we were born, on "accidents of birth", which afford us only a partial and perspectival view of truth, reality, the self. If we accept that our knowledge of the world is socially constructed, what is interesting is how people act, re-act and, in particular, inter-act. It is this social interaction, and in particular the (self)-expression it finds in language that provides "fresh kinds of data.....(observed) in contexts of situation" (Hymes, in Maybin, 1994: 11). From such data our shared understandings, our knowledge is constructed.

It must be emphasised at the outset that the concept of *truth* is central to my reading of social constructionism. In foregoing its unitary, absolutist guise it does not become a laissez-faire truism where "anything goes". *Truth* is not a fundamentalist principle to be assessed, and accepted or rejected by the individual mind. Rather it is seen as an indispensable regulative ideal which emerges from traditions of practice. Discourse is normatively accountable, this dissertation no less than any other. I invoke here the voice of the American poet John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) who wrote what I have come to think of as a

social constructionist morality tale. It impressed me with its simple folk wisdom when I first encountered it many years ago; its message is just as pertinent today.

The Blind Men and the Elephant:

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! But the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he:
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most:
Deny the fact who can
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see", quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

Moral:
So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about the Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

Long and hard they may dispute, but the personal, partial perspective of each of the blind protagonists at some stage has to cede to pragmatics.

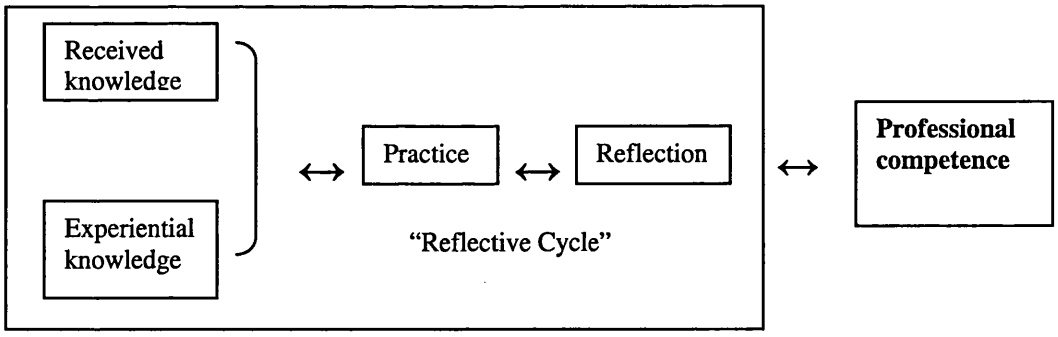
How are they to conceive of the elephant? They may all *see* it differently, but dealing with the elephant as if it were a wall, a spear or a snake will place them outside contextual, social norms. In order to be able to deal with it, to relate to it, to make use of it they have to come to some shared understanding; for all practical purposes, in order to proceed, consensus has to be reached as to the nature of the beast.

Thus are our truths constructed.

A biographical approach

In the 1995 publication "Teachers' Stories", David Thomas lists a whole series of biographical writings and narrative works published in the 1980s and 90s. He offers as a rationale for these, the view that "under certain conditions, biographic work by teachers, either autonomously or collaboratively with researchers, helps with professional development". Good teachers, in common with good professionals in other fields have always adopted a researching attitude to their work in the sense of reflecting critically and modifying their practice in the light of their observations. This is often done, with much success and very little fanfare, as a collaborative venture. So far, so uncontroversial. Thomas's further claim that teacher biography "has the potential for more systemic change" is less likely to gain universal acceptance within the academy.

My own efforts at research throw me back continually on personal experience. A career spanning over thirty years in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Pacific and the Middle East constitutes what Thomas (op. cit) terms "a corpus of professional understandings and craft knowledge that derives from experience". Clandinin and Connolly (in Denzin and Lincoln (eds), 1998: 150-178) view this experience as the very stuff of research. "Our imagination as educators has been captured by the possibility of studying experience rather than using experience as a contextual given for educational discourse". This fits well with the notion of reflexive practice embedded within the action research paradigm. Michael Wallace, in his very practical book on teacher training presents a model of the good (reflective) language teacher (fig.1).



(fig. 1)

Adapted from Wallace M. 1991 "Training Foreign language teachers: a reflective approach". Cambridge: CUP).

Clandinin and Connolly likewise present a holistic, cyclical approach to gaining knowledge and advancing practice. To the outcome of

professional competence, however, they would add *theoretical knowledge.* In this view experience deriving from practice forms a narrative, which in turn forms the basis of educational theory. The field text of such an enterprise is the (auto)biographical narrative, and the means of transmitting the data it contains is the text or narrative constructed by the researcher. "Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study" (Clandinin and Connolly, op. cit: 155). Narrative gives coherence and continuity to our experience by allowing us to explore the *text* i.e. the thoughts and actions of individuals, within a *context* of time and space. For me narrative data compels a narrative accounting. It also renders itself subject to narrative accountability, a point to which I will return in the final chapter whose heading, following Thomas, poses the question "treasonable or trustworthy text"?

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And so it is that I embark on " (this) act of writing (which) perches in the present, gazing backwards to the past while poised ready for flight into the future" (Abbs, 1974:7). I take the opportunity presented by post-modern views to elaborate a theoretical approach to research which emerges from the rich and fertile knowledge source of autobiographical experience, one which offers a resource for relating intra- and inter-culturally. I do not expect my narrative to offer "solutions" in any scientific sense to the issues which face us as

educators, but do seek its acceptance by the academy as one "contribution(..) to the creative continuity of our discourse community" (Edge and Richards, 1998:353).

I see the challenge before me as intimidating and emancipating in equal measure. I proceed with some trepidation in the light of the warnings of Walford (1998: 4-5), that a reflexive account of the research process leaves a relatively inexperienced researcher or doctoral candidate at the mercy of advocates of the dominant discourse. I can only re-iterate the invitation to my readers to engage with me in an exercise in truth-telling and truth seeking. In so doing I invoke at the outset the words of the Cree hunter, described in Clifford and Marcus (1986: 8) who, when administered the oath prior to giving evidence in a court of law, declared "I'm not sure I can tell the truth ..... I can only tell what I know".

Notes

[1] This, somewhat bold, assertion needs some qualification. While I have experienced little difficulty in accommodating my Christian belief to other cultures and creeds at a practical level (and always through discussion, through dialogue), at a more philosophical level, I struggle constantly with the teachings of my faith and the challenges presented by other ontological positions.

Researcher Notes

The autobiography which follows presents a view of education and educational research brought into being through constant *reflection* and *dialogue*, the pillars which give support to my epistemology and without which the edifice crumbles. (The critical dialogue and reflexivity here, it must be noted, go beyond the views of those for whom such notions are guiding principles in the professional development of the practitioner (c.f. Schőn, 1983, Wallace, 1991), seeking a deeper critical understanding of issues and relating them to the epistemic concerns of the discipline). Within my chosen paradigm I could have presented my text in traditional form as data for analysis and discussion. Since, however, my narrative constitutes not merely the data but is also the vehicle for analysis, such an approach has been rejected in favour of an integration of reflection and dialogue in the biographical narrative. In deference, however, to readers less tolerant than myself of ambiguity and deferral and given that my autobiography is to be considered not merely as a story but as the "raw data" from which I draw philosophical and epistemological conclusions, I have seen fit to disrupt the chronology of the autobiographical narrative by providing at various intervals a meta-commentary (*Researcher Notes*). The intention here is to address my readers directly, guiding them through my thought processes as I sketch an alternative theoretical approach to educational research which has evolved in concert with my views on the practice of education itself.

Part I

Barbara's story

Researcher Notes

Barbara's story, which forms a major part of the dissertation is an attempt, fictive and contrived, to put into practice this author's preference for critical approaches to research. Contrived is the attempt to make a case for biography through the medium of biography; to promote the storied nature of the self and of society through the medium of story. Fictive is the (necessarily) partial perspectivity of a narrative which yet claims to give voice to a variety of participants; aspects of the authorial self that is Barbara, together with many and varied other dialogic partners encountered in the narrative. Contrived too, for example, is the attempt to recapture early, less tangible, but crucially formative experiences via a series of "snapshots" presented through the device of simple text-box entries.

The biography presents a view of the educational process, arguably the main "character" of the story, as itself dialogically constructed, dynamic and permanently contested. It attempts a coherent and cohesive rendering of the author's encounters with education in a variety of contexts in the search for a literacy of educational research which will resonate with the reader and provide food for further debate and experimentation.

The first section *Genesis of an Enquiry* describes some pivotal moments which have brought me to the writing of this thesis. In the second chapter, *Narrative Beginnings* further significant experiences from my earlier childhood through schooling and my days as an undergraduate highlight the importance of language, story-telling and narrative in my personal and professional development. These snapshots remain vivid to me and are crucial to my sense of who I am and my place in the wider social, professional and academic context. Narrative is central to our formation; in my own case stories from the Gospels, the works of Shakespeare and the great poets, family myths, all present, I would contend, a fertile ground for enquiry into this most human, and consequently sensitive, messy, paradoxical, potentially life-changing enterprise we call "education". If, as I posited earlier, concern for truth/s and the telling of truth/s is a central philosophical concern and a pre-requisite for engagement in the educational process, then the biographical narrative is likely to provide a rich material source of educational research.

1. Genesis of an Enquiry

I never intended a doctorate.

A life-long love affair with language –yes.

A passion for education – certainly.

But the translation of these two central strands of my life into an academic treatise – not for a moment.

How then did it come to this?

I have taught in a myriad of contexts. Sharing the joy of discovery with the pre-school child in Kenya, the excitement of the school play in Vanuatu, the academic highs and lows of my students in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and at home here in Scotland – for me, education has always been about the exchange of ideas, the sharing of experience. And, I suppose, this whole doctorate business is just that – a desire, a need to impart my experience, to engage with other writers, to tussle with the ideas that arise, and to move on, somewhat older and, it is to be hoped, just a little wiser.

I started my career as a school teacher with a degree in Modern Languages and a Post-graduate Certificate in Education. For many years this sufficed. Then, one day in Vanuatu, where I had found a job I truly loved, as lecturer in charge of English at the country's satellite centre of the University of the South Pacific (USP), I discovered that a

junior member of staff had undertaken a distance-learning programme leading to a qualification in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). This was a pivotal moment for me. I began to reflect on the possible threat to my position by those whose paper credentials outweighed my own. While I had been teaching on my small Pacific island, there had been, I knew, some notable alterations to the educational climate in the UK in the 1980s. In another context Thomas (1995:2) writes: "A sea-change is often indicated by a shift in dominant metaphors". Students at home, it seemed, were now viewed as clients, and the teaching programme as a product to be bought, sold and haggled over in the market-place. As both teachers and students came under pressure to compete in this new scenario, the consequence was an increase in the demand for educational credentials. Resistant on the one hand to this commodification of education, I was yet aware that I had little alternative but to join the game [1]. With my teaching and family commitments a Masters was out of the question at this juncture, and so I enrolled on a distance-learning diploma course in ELT. My initial motivation had been entirely instrumental; I wanted the qualification. It was, however, to prove a very valuable experience. Not only did I learn a great deal about theories of language and language learning, but, through this correspondence course, I was engaged in discussion and dialogue with teachers in a variety of contexts and with the plethora of writing and debate that had emerged in the area of second language teaching. My diploma studies also re-awakened in me a desire to engage as the "other" interlocutor in the learning process, the student. It

was at this stage that I began to read professional journals; and, finding courage to assume in a different arena the mantle of "the other", I submitted my own work. The thrill of experiencing one's name in print!

Studies at diploma, and later Masters level, developed in me an interest, not just in research as a "process of obtaining and analysing information and data" Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:5), but in the theory underpinning research practice. I became increasingly interested in more philosophical aspects of research, in the ontological and epistemological assumptions which underpin what counts as valid research activity. Such concerns resulted from a very frustrating and disempowering experience on a Masters programme with a regime obsessed with Scott and Usher's (op.cit), "sterile dichotomies and questionable paradigms". I cannot overstate the influence of this episode on my future thinking. If education is a site of struggle and I believe it is, then this was a struggle in which I was fully engaged. I was determined not to give in. It would have been very easy for me to jump through the hoops set out very clearly and prescriptively for me. My award could have been an easy delivery nurtured by competent midwives instead of the protracted and painful birth it proved to be.

Problems encountered in the course of my Masters' highlighted the tension existing between the emancipatory appeal of teacher research and the fear of the consequences of such a radical conception. Having come to view as retrograde and unhelpful appeals to the methodology

and objectivity of "sound science", my quest began for an altogether "richer literacy" of educational research. When I embarked on the doctoral process, then, I had a fair idea of how I did **not** wish to proceed. And very soon I became aware that there are other ways forward. Epistemological positions adopted by feminists, post-colonialists, post-structuralists led me to believe that somewhere among the "posts" I too would find a base from which to explore and express my ontological position. Early on in my studies I encountered a paper in the form of a *récit,* a narrative, by an eminent French sociologist, Daniel Bertaux, describing his conversion to a life-history approach in the social sciences (1981, chapter 2). With a sound training in science and philosophy, Bertaux had started out as a **positivist** (Bertaux's emphasis). As such, he spent many years seeking through scientific methods a revelation of social laws, in the way of physical laws; accurate, eternal and universal. The *irruption* of May 1968 on an apparently self-satisfied French society led him to question the scientism of sociological thinking. The awakening was abrupt, but what he describes as the consciousness of his own ignorance "slowly unrolled ... along the years, like the silent explosion of a nebula". The account of Bertaux charters an exciting journey characterised by an increasing unease with the limitations of both scientific and theoretical approaches to sociology, paralleled by a growing confidence in the validity (Bertaux's term) of an alternative methodology – the collecting of life stories (*les récits de vie*). His text achieves a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) which, as described by Denzin (1998: 324) "gives the

context of an experience, states the intention and meaning that organized the experience, and reveals the experiences as a process (out of which) arises a text's claim for truth, or its verisimilitude". Bertaux's account held for me a validity, a sincerity, which resonated with my emerging view that truth/s are to be found in the social experiences narrated by individuals, with the social scientist seeking to mediate rather than to define or explain. It was only much later, when considering the form and function of my own dissertation, that I came to realise how much I had been influenced by Bertaux's narrative. It is only now as I write that I realise too the centrality of Geertz's "thick description" in my own efforts to gain acceptance for my text in progress.

A second defining instance was a seminar presented (1999) to staff and post-graduate students at the University of Bath by Gerald Grace of the Institute of Education. Professor Grace stressed the need for reflexivity in the research project in order to explode once and for all the still-pervasive myth of scientific objectivity. My own evolving position on the nature of educational research found resonance in his definition of research within our discipline as "a humane study with a humane intent, (which)..... cannot, with integrity, develop a research culture which is not in itself humane, i.e. participative, methodologically catholic, critically reflexive, culturally sensitive and intent upon the enhancement of the potentiality and dignity of persons"..

The seeds were thus planted which would ripen slowly and develop into this research enquiry.

Note

[1] I have a deal of sympathy with the views of Brown on the social and educational consequences of "credential inflation" (in Halsey et al (eds) 1997, 736-750). For Brown the apparent widening of educational access has led simply to a shifting of the goal posts, as higher socio-economic groups manoeuvre to preserve their privilege and influence.

2. Narrative Beginnings

The epistemological assumption underlying narrative enquiry is that our world view is structured by narrative, our thoughts and actions guided by a "narrative principle" (Sarbin, 1986). We are story-tellers by nature; it is through stories that we make sense of our lives (Sarbin, op.cit., Bruner, 1990). "Every culture of which we know has been a story-telling culture." (Brockmeier and Harré, 2001:42). And this, the storied nature of our lives and our attempts to make sense of them, both so integral to our sense of who we are and our place in the larger scale of things, is what underlies the discursive or narrative turn in psychology and the interest in narrative techniques.

There is a sense in which personal narratives *are* people's identities: "(w)e dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (Hardy, 1998:5 cited in Pavlenko, 2002:213). Narrative thus becomes the clay with which social scientists seek to mould their views about the individual as a sentient and social being, and about the social framework in which s/he operates (Hermans, 1997, Gergen, 1999, Freeman, 2001). Brian Fay (1996: 198) insists on the dual character of narrative, both lived and told. "We might say that our lives are enstoried and our stories are enlived". We give sense to our lives and to the lives of others only when we can perceive the existence of an underlying plot or structure, when we can connect past to present to

future. Neurotic, even psychotic, disorders occur if we lose this narrative thread (Fay, 1996, Freeman 2001, Harré 2001, Lewis, 2003) if, in common parlance we *lose the plot.* Indeed, one of the techniques employed by psychotherapists in the management of neurotic behaviour involves the re-viewing of past events in such a way as to allow the patient to re-structure her self- or life-narrative. Day Sclater, (in Seale et al: in press) discusses the vast data set she collected during a pilot study done in 1995 of individuals who had "survived" the trauma of separation and divorce. She concludes:

> *The appearance of unity and coherence came from the narrative or in other words the autobiographical genre provided a template for continuing life and a coherent sense of self.*

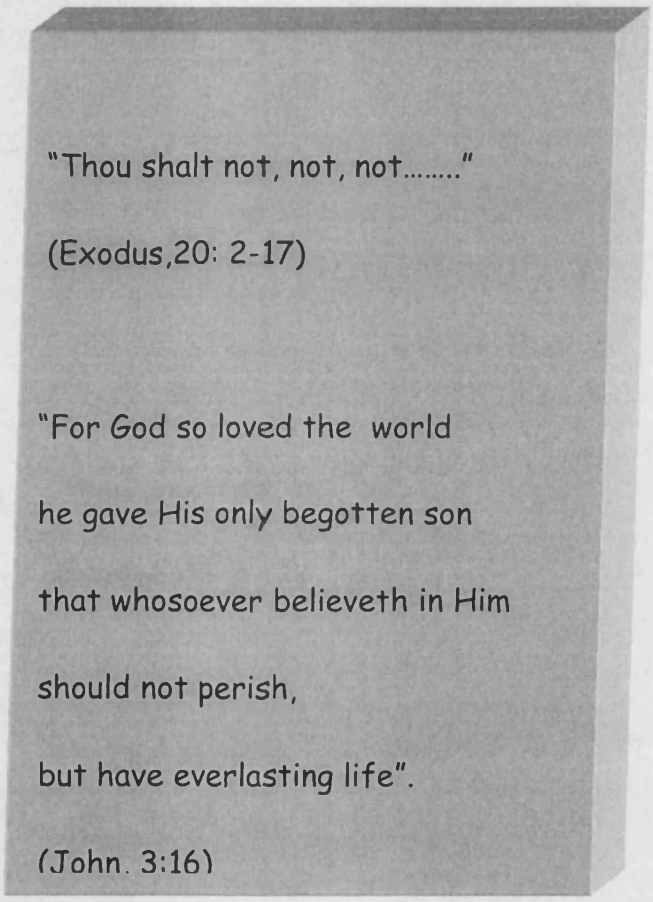
As I reflect in the following pages on my own narrative I have a strong recollection of a vibrant story-telling tradition, and an awareness too of the importance of this in the construction of a child's sense of who she is and where she fits (or indeed, does not) into the fabric of things.

.....

In the beginning……

In the beginning were the **words**; I grew up surrounded by them.

In a house without books the walls resonated with the directives of the Old Testament, juxtaposed with the promise of the New….



Leave aside the mixed messages of the above, the internal contradictions of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" cited side by side with exhortations to "turn the other cheek"; the reminders to "love thy neighbour" which sat easily with the demonisation of the Catholic family next door as worshippers of "graven images". The words flowed, harbingers of Truth.

An alternative Truth emerged on a Saturday evening with the arrival, after "closing time", of my commie uncle Morrie, prophesying his "dictatorship of the proletariat" – another expression whose internal paradox it seems to me I recognised instinctively.

No dialogue ever took place between these two schools of thought. As a child I imbibed the poetry and the politics of each, setting aside niggling questions of logic to a later, less innocent stage.

There were **words**, rich in myth and metaphor.

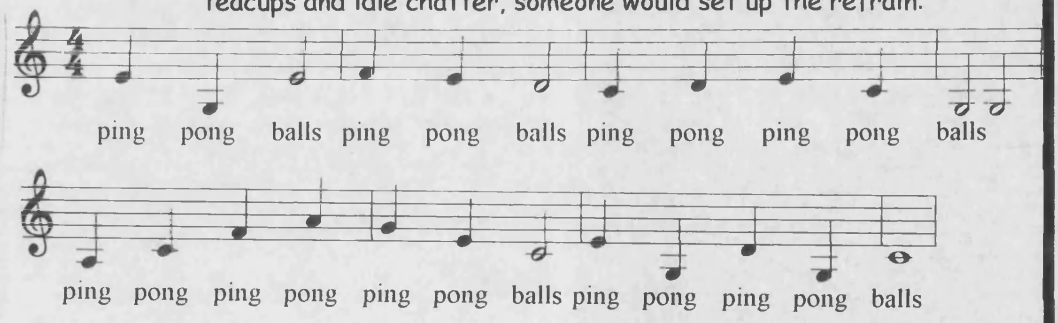
The Poetry

Is there for honest poverty
That hings his heid, an a' that?
The coward slave, we pass him by -
We daur be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an a' that,
Our toils obscure, an a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that.
.....

The verse of Burns, where "A Man's a Man for A' That", recited by some as a psalm to our humility and equality before God, for others (uncle Morrie among them) yielded a proud anthem of the Revolution. People preached – they didn't discuss – the words flowed nevertheless.

The Sing-Songs

"She's awfy quiet" visitors would say of me approvingly,
as I bathed in the atmosphere of a strange local ritual
held every six weeks or so, as rotation demanded,
in the living room of our small East-end tenement.
This gathering of middle-aged women had its origins
somewhere in the traditions of the Loyal (sic) Orange
Order (LOL), another institution whose internal
contradictions of Bible worship and sectarian hatred
contributed to my cultural confusions. Whatever its
purpose, it was a good-natured affair where, once again,
singing and the reciting of verse held sway.
No slacking was permitted.
Whenever it was felt enough time had been given to
teacups and idle chatter, someone would set up the refrain:



This went on unremittingly until another stepped in
with a more appropriate contribution, and, as a new
voice rang out, weary faces melted into reverie and nostalgia.....

Any excuse sufficed; birthdays, weddings, New Year, or just a Saturday night at the neighbours'. Everyone had their party piece; no-one could cry shy. Glaswegians learn to sing as soon as they can talk.

.....and last, but by no means least, there was a Glaswegian's first language,

The Patter

We are renowned as Scotland's ***patter merchants.***

Any outsider wishing an introduction to what this means need look no further than the stories of Billy Connolly - for the "Big Yin" is not a comedian, but a story-teller in the best Glasgow tradition [1]. Second only to Billy Connolly as an exponent of patter was a character called "wee Geordie", another occasional Saturday evening visitor. Geordie was considered a master craftsman, not just of the patter but of that branch of it we share with our Cockney cousins - rhyming slang. We children worshipped at the feet of this wordsmith, awe-struck as he talked of the "sour grapes" going off to the "pine" and accusing us of being "coarn beef" if we failed to catch on to his meaning at once. * Geordie was a street-smart character - you didn't want to get on the wrong side of him - we all learned quickly.

* sour grape - pape - *abbreviation of* papist i.e. catholic
pine - pineapple - *rhymes with* chapel i.e. catholic church
coarn beef - corned beef *rhymes with* deif = deaf

There I was then, surrounded by talk, by the stories which sustained a way of life changing so rapidly in those early post-War years; the myth and the magic of my grandmother's fireside tales, the romance of my mother's war-time memories of handsome American soldiers, strong female friendships, make-up shortages, fake tan and pencilled stocking seams – all a far-cry from the alternative reality of the badly-lit, under-heated munitions factory where she had spent five of her precious young years. My father's recollections of war told a quite other story. He had enlisted in His Majesty's Navy even before his 18th birthday. Early tales of honour and heroism soon disintegrated, however, into an abyss of images vivid not only to himself but to those who witnessed his frequent hellish nightmares. Unable to effect a restructuring of his self-narrative, my father found his solace at the bottom of a whisky bottle, and died long 'ere his time.

.....

Home was not my only habitat; I was soon faced with a new discourse community. The relative ease with which I absorbed the language of school concealed a tension which was there from the beginning, enriching my life while at the same time cutting me off to an extent from the cultural expectations of home.

The First Big Word

I can still feel the tension of the moment as I sound out the word

b – a – s – k – e - t

for an astonished Primary I teacher. We have just progressed from the 2-letter **a-t** to the 3-letter **b-a-t** and **c-a-t** ..... And the whole thing falls into place for me. Never mind that we haven't yet been introduced to "kicking *k*", or that the sound I intuitively require I know to be represented by the symbol *c*. My innate knowledge of language assures me the word has to be "basket".
Tolerance of ambiguity, pre-requisite of the good language learner, in evidence at the age of 5!

This incident remains vivid in my mind. I can see the place on the classroom wall where the magic word is displayed. I see no other child – it is me, the teacher, ... and the **word**. For years I ascribed to this incident an importance it could not have possessed. I believed this was the moment when a decision was made that I should "skip" a class. It never occurred to me it might have something to do with all the mysterious, exciting little games we played with shapes, number and colour, and which I enjoyed as a diversion from the dullness and boredom of much of my first year at school [2].

The Words of Shakespeare

A Midsummer Nights Dream
on a grey Glasgow day
in a grey Glasgow classroom,
mangled and hung out to ridicule
by a series of miscreants
whose wit is rivalled only
by the popular mechanicals of the text.

Initial glee at the discomfiture of the
teacher is soon replaced by tedium.

The gloom disappears.
The words take over.

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
.....

Woe betide anyone who dared suggest to me from then on that the works of Shakespeare or other "serious" works of literature have no cultural relevance or resonance for the majority of children!

French Words

stage,
spotlight;
dignified,
disembodied
presence,

The energy of
WORDS

joy,
yearning,
tragedy

meaning nothing
(and everything)
to me

A listener in the gods

I am captivated by the cadences, the rhythms, the feast of words and emotions emanating from this presence on stage. My love affair with French began on that day.

In retrospect too I am filled with respect and admiration for the teacher who had the courage to expose a bunch of kids from the east-end to a series of readings from the French classicists, Corneille and Racine, performed by a member of the *Comédie Française,* and equally, for his temerity in exposing the actress on stage to possible derision from the rascals in the gods.

The language of school..... the language of home .....

.....and never the twain shall meet

Ours was a double life. Not for us the post-modern acceptance of the boundary dweller. The divide between home and school was great. The position was clear. Either you "stayed", in which case the culture of school was something of an irrelevance, a mere backdrop to the reality of street and home. Or you "left", suffering an acute sense of betrayal in the process. Another snapshot presents itself to me, illustrating the duality of our world.

A Teacher's Words

Mr. Firth:	Barbara, you have a real flair for languages. Have you ever considered going to university?
Barbara:	What's university, sir?

My response above was quite genuine. I had never considered the term *university* before. No-one in my experience had gone there, no-one talked about going there; it was quite simply out of my world... [3]

From then on I guarded this yearning, invoked by these words - *flair for languages ... ...university.....*

.....

The above then is a recollected reality of my childhood. Other realities lay in waiting of course, but that's another (part of my) story.

Notes

[1] The self-consciously ironic humour of the Glaswegian can be compared to that found in recent Amerindian autobiographies (Fischer , op.cit: 224), where such humour is used "as a survival skill, a tool for acknowledging complexity, a means of exposing or subverting oppressive hegemonic ideologies, and an art for affirming life in the face of objective troubles". This finds support in the revelations in Connolly's recent biography "Billy" where an extremely difficult, indeed abusive, up-bringing and lack of any prospect for change gave rise to a cruel, yet affectionate, de-bunking of the sustaining culture.
Scots, in particular urban, working-class Scots, are intolerant of pomposity and self-aggrandisement; witness the Scottish footballers who have made a virtue of the team's mediocrity, and, in contrast to their English counterparts, are welcomed throughout Europe for their ability to survive (and smile).

[2] A child's take on the infamous intelligence tests of the 50s and 60s designed to isolate the magical *g factor*.

[3] ...and this in the city of Glasgow, whose proud centre of learning celebrated in 2001 its fifth centenary.

Researcher Notes

From the experience, reflection and dialogue described in the following chapter *Auto?-biography* emerges a growing awareness of the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the individual and the culture in which s/he operates. Autobiography is posited not only as self-revelation but as a revelation of traditions of practice which form the individual and which in turn are informed by individual discourse. Once again a few snapshots are offered as further evidence for a central theme of this dissertation, viz. that education provides a forum for the affirmation and the subversion of cultural practices, in post-modern terms a "third space", where dialogue and reflection become the processes through which the voice of the other is given a hearing.

This section too provides a clear articulation of my own theory of the self which has been honed and refined through reflection and dialogue with the theories of Mead, Bakhtin, Hymes, Bruner, Gergen, and Harré. Challenges to biological and cognitivist conceptions of the essential self by discursive psychologists such as Gergen and Harré owe much to the discipline of Conversation Analysis (CA), one of my own current areas of teaching and research. CA arose from the concerns of its founder Harvey Sacks to develop a sociology based on actual talk-in-interaction .* In his analysis of talk Sacks was concerned not to explicate underlying cognitive processes but to examine the regulative nature of discourse which places normative constraints on discursive

procedures. Similarly the self of discursive psychology is placed firmly within the broader social narrative where it achieves its coherence and consistency through discursive practice, in our words and deeds, in dialogue and interaction with others.

Here, once again, I am able to identify a clear cyclical articulation between my research interests and my practice. A passion for language, language as *form,* language as *function,* and language in its *poetic* and *creative* manifestation has heightened my awareness of context and culture, and brought me to seek within the fields of philosophy and psychology an epistemology which allows me to account for my contextualist, constructionist views of essential philosophical concepts such as *truth, reality, self.*

* For a clear account of CA, its principles, practices and applications, see Hutchby, I. and Wooffitt, R. 1998. *Conversation Analysis.*

3. Auto?-biography

And so continues the story of Barbara. I call it my story. It is, of course, not mine alone, incorporating as it does the stories of so many others. Reminiscing over the years with my brother and sisters about our childhood, I have come to realise that our individual "take" on events differs, in some cases quite radically. We are each of us, nevertheless, the person we are today, to an extent, because of those shared experiences: "the child is father of the man". Bruner (2001:28) has pointed out, however, that in autobiography this old adage is turned around, and "the man reclaims the role of being father to the child – .... this time recapturing the child for the culture by the use of the culture's theory and stories"

The anthropologist, Michael Fischer (1986:198) expresses the nature of autobiography in his own poetic way when he states:

> *What (...) seem initially to be individualistic autobiographical searchings turn out to be revelations of traditions, re-collections of disseminated identities and of* ***the divine sparks of the breaking of the vessels.***
> (my emphasis)

This evocation of autobiography is one I have come back to again and again in the course of this research. There are two aspects which appeal. The first is the view of autobiography as a revelation of traditions. It will be apparent, I believe, that the parts of my story already recounted have revealed much about the culture(s) and traditions of my childhood, and conversely, that those traditions have

helped to structure the stories of both the child I then was, and the adult I have since become. The relationship, however, is not one of mere reciprocity. For, in the **re**-creating of past events from my present perspective I am creating an actuality, a text which allows me to ground myself, to centre myself, in a very real sense to "go on" in the face of conflicting "forms of life" [1]. I am, as Fischer would have it, re-collecting my "disseminated identities".

The second element of Fischer's evocation which keeps drawing me back is the very poetic and a very poignant metaphor of the vessel. This evokes for me the beautiful image of a clay pot (fig.3) crafted in the loving hands of the potter for use by the community perhaps as storage or transport but, more, serving as a cultural artefact imbued with the aesthetic of the community in question. I think of all the exquisite pots fashioned by lowly potters [2] in many of the communities I knew in Kenya, in Vanuatu, and in Oman; in Kathmandu I see my small sons trawling the river to collect the little clay dishes, discarded after being used as lamps during Diwali, the Festival of Light, or as containers for *puja* (offerings of rice, spices and crushed petals) at times of other religious festivals. To break such a vessel is to destroy a thing of beauty. And yet, in the breaking of the vessel lies opportunity for the potter to hone his skills, to feed his family; therein too lies the re-invigoration of the community as they prepare for the next festival, negotiating and re-negotiating the purchases and the rituals and strengthening cultural ties.

fig. 3

"A cultural artefact imbued with the aesthetic of the community"

The analogy is clear. It is the breaking, the challenging of the known, the given, the taken-for-granted, that releases the "divine sparks", thus igniting for us a whole world of possibilities. It is in the (often lengthy, and almost invariably painful) reconciliation of past, present and future, in the never-ending spiral of negotiation, that our human potential is

realised. This is social constructionism at work, and this, I maintain, is the very heart and soul of the educational process.

In my own case the challenges and the tensions increased as my formal education continued with a move to university in Aberdeen. It is difficult from my present perspective to appreciate the sense of alienation I felt for much of this time. I loved my studies and made many new friends, **but** the feeling of being an "outsider", *l'étranger* of the Camus' novel, persisted. For years afterwards I was ashamed of the shame I felt for my roots in working-class Glasgow; it took many years for me to come to terms with my two worlds, to see the richness (and the poverty) of each. I did not have the confidence or the maturity of a Ralph Glaser whose wonderful account *Gorbals Boy at Oxford* I read many years later. Not for me the Lawrentian tag "glorious young animal" which attached itself to Glaser at Oxford. As a seventeen-year old at university in Scotland, my experience was one of .....

Anomie: a feeling of uncertainty about one's place and one's loyalties in a new situation (Wilga Rivers, 1983: 148).

Sleeping a lot in the afternoons

Return home often (too often)

The unease deepens

No-one wants to know

The sense of exoticism applied to Glaser was something I did not experience until I undertook my first journey abroad, as part of my degree studies in modern languages. Here, in this new discourse community my cachet was to be that of "étranger", the exotic foreigner, no longer the "outsider" of Camus' novel.

Exhilarating Words

CRS - filez!

It is 1968.

I am part of a mob running down the road

in front of the university of Lyon.

Arriving at class to be met with a line

of heavily- armed police - TERRIFYING.

Their very presence invokes panic.

The shout "Police - scarper" is all it takes.

Mob hysteria;

the police unsure how to react.

My stay in Lyon and a subsequent stint at the University of Vienna opened new vistas to me. This was a period of awakening to worlds very different from my sheltered Scottish upbringing. Associating with

students from all over the world, for the first time I felt liberated from the social and cultural baggage I carried around. In constant dialogue with the new experiences surrounding me I was somehow able to resituate myself.

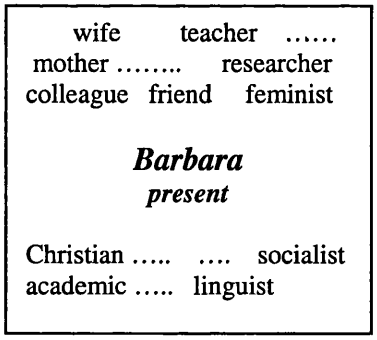
.....

As I look over my early snapshots I am surprised by the intensity of the memories evoked. It seems to me I have under-estimated the cultural capital I acquired in my childhood years. My awareness of difference in the university stage of my education must be all too evident to the reader. Here I had this persistent feeling that I was in the wrong place; it was only a matter of time before this impostor was found out. The emancipation afforded me by the move to a new country, and perhaps more significantly, to a new language, was something I was aware of even at the time. There is a sense in which operating in a new environment and in a different language allows for an almost conscious reconstruction of the self. Gee (1994:169) is quite categorical in his assertion that "a change of discourse practices is a change of identity" (my emphasis). Self is a dynamic entity. The self/ves-development which comes from opening oneself up to new and different experiences has been a constant in my life. I returned from my eighteen months in "Europe" knowing much more about who I was, where I was coming from and where I wanted to go.....

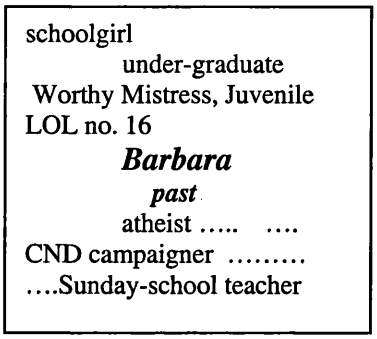
This apparent reconciliation was, of course, simply a preparation for the next phase of my story, for my story is, as all stories are, never-ending; its characters not only the people I have encountered in its making, but also the various situated, contextualised selves that constitute the person I am today.

At this stage I find my intellectual self, that self which has come to expect from a research text a degree of academic rigour, urging a closer scrutiny of the concepts of *self* and *person.* Here then is my own (present) understanding of the self/person distinction:

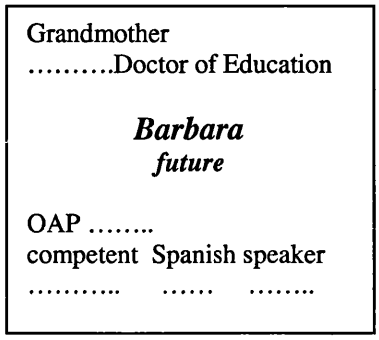
The *person*, to whom I shall attach my given name, Barbara, is composed of a multiplicity of contextualised selves, only some of which are illustrated below.



Even that, however, is only a small part of the story, since the Barbara of today has been constituted to a large extent by past selves, for example,

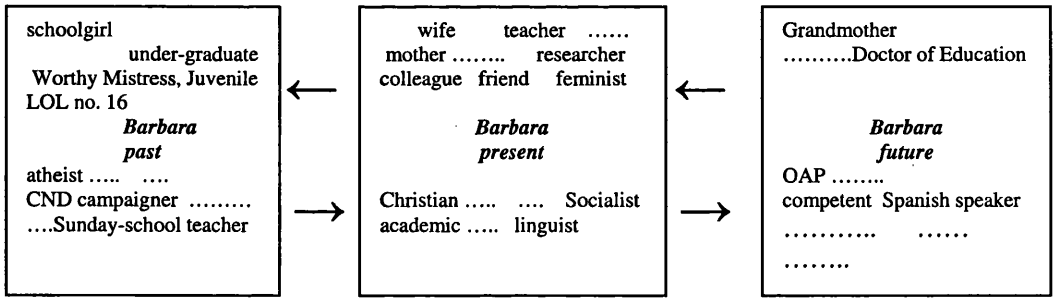


And what is more, my potential selves, some anticipated, others unforeseen/unforeseeable.....



are also contained, to a degree, in the person I am today.

A more appropriate illustration of "Barbara" then would present all three as interconnected, and co-dependent.



In my story, Barbara is both the narrator and the narrated. The narrator, the embodied, situated "I", is the executive, re-collecting and selecting from the past to recount, not **the** story of Barbara, but **a** story of Barbara, a story composed of many selves, many voices, themselves situated in time and place, and each relevant to the present narrative. In this executive self there resides the notion of *agency*, the facility to *choose*, to select those selves or aspects of selves relevant to the present narrative. The self-conscious reflexivity involved in this process,

however, raises the stakes. No longer a mere executor, the "I", in this scenario, takes on a creative role. As Fay (1996: 39) so succinctly puts it, "the self is not a noun but a verb". More fully expressed:

> *The self should be conceived as an ongoing activity of self-creation rather than a pre-existing container of experience. Better to think of it as a multi-faceted, internally conflicted field of potential energy which becomes actualized in interaction with others than as a fixed, solid, substantial thing.* (op.cit: 39)

Fay, in common with other contextualists, (Burkitt, 1991, Hermans, 1997, Bruner, 2001, Freeman, 2001), rejects the notion of an essential self independent of the process of self-construction. Like the anthropologist, Mead, and psychologists, Vygotsky and Bruner, the above thinkers site the origins of the self firmly within the realm of social and discursive practices. Burkitt (1991: 90), discussing the contributions of Mead, puts it quite simply: "(i)t is society that is the basis for the self". Both Mead and the Russian theorist Vygotsky posit a dialogic relationship between the self and society. Mead views thought as inner dialogue between the *I*, a kind of intuitive, spontaneous self and the *me*, the standards of the group which are modified in dialogue over time (Wetherell and Maybin, 1996:249). Vygotsky's (1986) theory of development rests on the notion of an interdependent dialogic relationship between the child and her environment. In the course of interaction with others the child develops a self-awareness or self-consciousness which allows for higher-level cognitive practices. Add to this Bakhtin's (1984:293) view that "life by its very nature is dialogic", and further ....."the single adequate form

for verbally expressing human life is the open-ended dialogue", and we have a powerful dialogic basis for a constructionist approach to research into that most human of enterprises, education.

Any discussion of the psychology of personhood demands a consideration of the work of the discursive psychologist, Rom Harré. One of the central figures in the field, Harré holds that "the sense of self has its origin in certain narrative practices in which an infant is treated as a nascent person" (2001: 58); the influence of Vygotsky is clear. Engagement with these thinkers, from Mead, through Bakhtin's (op.cit) "self as a polyphonic novel", to Vygotsky, and in particular the writings of Rom Harré, has been crucial in the development of my own thinking. Harré's 1998 publication *The Singular Self* presents an exposé of his views on personhood.

He elaborates (p.9) what he calls his "standard model":

Person {self 1, self 2, self 3}

In this model, self 2 represents what the person **is,** "the totality of personal attributes", self 3 is the way we **seem** to others "the multiple and shifting pattern of the complex groupings of dispositions and skills and abilities prescribed to us by other persons". In my own model *Barbara past, Barbara present* and *Barbara future* together constitute what Harré presents as selves 2 and 3. My preferred working conception of *Barbara,* the executive and creative *I* of my story, resembles Harré's Self 1, described as "the structural singularity of individual experience and action, ordered by reference to our individual

bodies" (p.16). This "structured singularity" gives coherence and cohesion to our sense of who we are at any given point.

Whilst seeing the self as variously "distributed" (Bruner, 1990), "fluid" (Gergen, 1991) or a collection of "disseminated identities" (Fischer 1986), a discursive approach yet affirms the concept of personal singularity as "the leitmotif of all our forms of life" (Harré, op.cit. 1998: 2). Evidence of our awareness of a personal embodied singularity, woven together by means of our self-narrative, is to be found in the discourse of everyday life; *he's not himself today, that's so out of character*, and the already-mentioned *she's lost the plot.* Precisely where the source of this singularity resides is a matter of debate, and one which lies outside the scope of this present work.

Underlying Harré's discursive view of psychology is a presupposition of "a complex of motoric and cognitive activity...(as) a biological endowment that cannot be partitioned into one or the other" and, following Vygotsky, "a minimal endowment of expressive abilities and the ability to imitate the actions of the symbiotic partner" (1998: 13). The discursive view is not a refutation of, for example, the developmental stages posited by Piaget, based on the problem-solving activity if the child. Nor does it seek a denunciation of Chomsky's LAD (Language Acquisition Device). Social constructionist in its orientation, the discursive view represents a search beyond such notions to what happens next, what the "nascent person" of Harré and

Vygotsky *does* with this endowment, how it is realised in discourse within the social context.

I have presented my own conception of the singularity of self as the source of agency, of choice, of creativity. This is the self that gives coherence and cohesion to my text. The *consistency* of my narrative is dependent on the ability of this self to weave out of the contextualised past, present and future selves a narrative which allows for the continuity of the singular self that is *Barbara*, the executive and creative *I* of my narrative. Narrative consistency resides not in character, but in plot. I make no apologies for this; this is simply the way things are. Each of us is a mass of ostensible contradictions; I think of gay and lesbian Catholics and of the would-be women priests of my own experience who struggle to reconcile the irreconcilable. They succeed, as we all succeed, by finding a working accommodation which allows them to "go on".

Any culture is sustained by the complicity of its members; our self-making, our narrative in other words, is normatively accountable, and must be structured in terms acceptable to the prevailing form of life. The release, however, of the "divine sparks" or the "potential energy" of Fischer and Fay, requires of our narrative an element of "exceptionality"; it must be "a violation of the folk-psychologically canonical that is itself canonical" (Bruner, 2001: 29-30); that is, it must

simultaneously affirm and subvert. After my radicalising experiences in Lyon and Vienna I was more concerned to subvert than to affirm. Later, in dialogue with cultures quite different from my own, I would re-evaluate my childhood experiences, and come to an appreciation of the gifts bestowed on me in my early years by family, teachers and friends. In the meantime, however, I was on the look-out for new and exciting experiences. My formal education completed with a degree and a teaching qualification, I embraced with delight the opportunity to practice my new profession in the exciting environment of post-colonial Africa. In August of 1973, as a young, newly-married teacher, I set off with my husband to take up a teaching post in Kenya. For three years our only contact with "home" was through letters which took about 3 weeks to arrive. We had no telephone, no computers and, of course, wonderful e-mail was undreamt of. It was to prove one of the happiest and most productive periods of my life (not least due to the birth of our three sons during our six-year stay!). Professionally too, I came of age in the highlands of Kenya.

Notes

[1]The notion "forms of life", at the heart of Wittgensteinian philosophy, is of epistemological significance in the present work. I offer as a working definition, Grayling's (1988: 85) view that "(t)he form of life is "the frame of reference we learn to work within when trained in the language of our community".

[2] Coming from a post-artisan tradition, where skills of pot-making, basket-weaving etc have been all but lost as cultural activities, I was always surprised by the lowly status of the "potter caste" in communities in the developing world. As an artisanal endeavour in British culture, the craft of pottery was no doubt similarly regarded; today, anyone setting herself up as a relatively skilled potter can anticipate a fair degree of admiration and respect in our society: a further example of the contextualised nature of, at least some of, our values.

Researcher Notes

The two chapters which follow, in which I explore my encounters with individuals, societies and folk psychologies very different from my own, continue to trace the evolution of my present preference for an experiential, narrative approach to education and educational research. An evolving awareness of the inter-connectedness of language and culture emerges and issues of cultural and cross-cultural appropriacy are addressed in the examination of different teacher types and different teaching methodologies. Cultural and cross-cultural engagement, the interaction of the self and the environment, are construed discursively as *Text and (con)text* in Chapter 5, as I invoke in my critique insights from my current areas of teaching and research interest, Social and Critical Discourse Analysis. Here, three contextual features, *Culture, Gender, Hierarchy*, are posited as crucially relevant to the understanding of educational discourse and examined accordingly. My narrative at this stage continues to develop the case for a constructed, situated, interactional reading of *truth, reality, the self*, and of our need to take account of this in our educational practice, as we engage with others who do not necessarily share our world-view.

4. Cross-cultural encounters of the educational kind

David Thomas, in "Teachers' Stories" (op.cit), reflects on the necessity for an expanded definition of the term "career". The idea of an unambiguous career path in the teaching profession was prevalent in the sixties and early seventies. When, one year after graduating, I announced my decision to go with my husband on a teaching contract to Kenya, the reaction from colleagues took one of two forms. Younger colleagues on the whole thought we were crazy to leave before making our mark on the profession. Many older teachers supported our decision to try something different before we started moving up the promotion ladder, the implication being that once you had a foothold you stepped off at your peril and would find it difficult if not impossible to get back on. No-one saw it as a positive career move. The idea that we might gain some valuable educational experience which would enhance our personal as well as our professional personae never arose.

African encounters

My first trip to Africa really excited me. The post-colonial years were very challenging ones for idealistic young educators like myself. This was a period of unprecedented expansion in education provision; optimism abounded. It seemed that unlimited opportunities were there for those with the skills to take advantage of them, and education was seen as the route to a life of prosperity and security for newly-

independent nations. I felt privileged to be part of this project. My optimism was sustained during the six years I taught at my girls' school in the beautiful highlands of Kenya, and East Africa retains a very special place in my heart and in the affections of my family. My subsequent view has been modified, however, in the light of personal experience and the reports of others. This is summed up in an image which remains with me from that first experience of Africa.

I am watching a play written and performed by a group of bright and very earnest fifth formers. As is commonly the practice they have taken as their theme the struggles of the Mau-Mau resistance movement.

One of the characters, a well-known folk hero, rallies his supporters with the refrain:

What do we want

REVOLUTION

What shall we do?

REVOLVE

Much of Africa, it seems, has been revolving ever since.

Some of my earlier doctoral work [1] made much of the legacy of colonialism and the intransigence of lender countries in the face of the continent's obscene burden of debt. Africa's problems, however, do not begin and end there. There is famine, there is war. There has been a succession of corrupt and ruthless governments in many African nations whose leaders, despite their fine rhetoric, have shown contempt for their people by accumulating vast wealth while the majority struggle in dire poverty to feed their children and send them to school.

Then there is the scourge of AIDS.

A more recent teaching experience in the small, tightly-knit nation of Botswana in southern Africa was overshadowed by this cruel pandemic, the extent of which was articulated in "The Guardian", 8 July, 2002, by Dr. Banu Khan, head of Botswana's National Aids Co-ordinating Agency. He stated quite starkly "We are facing extinction". Around 40% of the country's adult population is infected with the most virulent form of the virus, and life expectancy is now below 40 years. It is impossible in Botswana to avoid the massive AIDS publicity campaign initiated by the government. Huge posters shout the message:

If this is an attempt to educate the nation, it is failing. A huge gulf exists between preaching and practice, particularly, and most ironically, in so-called centres of education. During my stay there large and costly campaigns were organised in schools and colleges to educate the young about safe sexual practices. Yet in this conservative and patriarchal society, schoolgirls were at grave risk not just from older students but from teachers and headteachers who saw sexual coercion as their right and privilege; in my own places of work younger female members of staff were regularly harassed by male students. There is too a very strong culture of denial, even among those conversant with the statistics and the dangers of the disease. In the villages matters are considerably

worse. I know of one village where the whole population is infected, and the prevalent belief is that a curse has been placed on the community by jealous neighbours. A friend, a Catholic priest, was threatened with repatriation to the US when he dared to name (in private to the family) the illness which had deprived them of their son. All of my memories of teaching in Botswana are overshadowed by the faces of colleagues and students lost to this deadly disease.

The above represents for me a failure of the educational process (and its adjuncts: teachers, administrators, curriculum designers) to engage with deeper institutional and cultural concerns surrounding this terrible disease [2]. If we adopt the notion of "educational process as text" (Stables, 1996), a notion to which we return in Part II, then this is a clear example of a "surface approach" which results in only a very superficial understanding of what is going on. It is a failure of the readers of the text to engage at every level, to "read between the lines", to question basic assumptions and conclusions, all aspects of a deep approach to textual study, which allows the reader (to paraphrase Marton and Booth, 1997:37) to see things in a new light, relate them to the world they live in, see the need for change.

Two further examples will serve to highlight the dangers of both a surface approach to the educational (con)text and a surface (technicist) view of teacher roles. One aspect of my job in Botswana was to assist in the up-grading of the qualification within the primary teacher training colleges from certificate to diploma status. I was part of a team

of very committed professionals charged with developing a new course in Language and Study Skills. Unfortunately, our considerable efforts fell victim to political and institutional factors over which we had little control. Everything we have learned about the much-researched area of study skills and strategy training calls for an integrated approach, at the centre of which is a meaningful negotiation between teacher and learner. In this particular case, however, the need among colleagues to "empire-build", together with the perceived superiority of theory over practice, led to a hi-jacking of the methodology. A course at the forefront of innovative practice became heavily content-based and theoretical, with applied knowledge taking a poor second place. While not wishing to designate institutional and political factors *per se* as *contiguities*, we must be constantly aware of the power of matters peripheral to educational praxis to deflect us from our main purpose. I share the frustration of many, articulated in 1992 by Paul Ramsden:

> *.....we have enough knowledge of the essence and substance of good teaching in higher education to alter the quality of learning out of all recognition.*
> (p. 268)

A powerful claim indeed. Ramsden does not claim, however, to have all the answers; in the vastly complicated social world and its microcosm, the classroom in which we operate, there are no universal prescriptions. We must be aware too that any remedies we do find, in the way of the antibiotic or the anti-malarial drug, are likely to be more or less effective depending on their context of operation, and may even become obsolete as the virus or problem area adapts and develops.

A third example of a very superficial grasp of the educational text was encountered in the colleges' research committee. My role here was to encourage speakers from within our community to present papers and workshops for the professional development of the staff as a whole. All the presenters had gained Masters degrees from the UK or the US, and so would be in a position to offer expertise in certain areas. Awarding institutions can be proud of many of these former students, but they must at the same time bear some responsibility for the ignorance of others. On one memorable occasion, a member of staff whose Masters thesis had dealt with issues of gender in African school textbooks expressed opinions ranging from the daft to the downright dangerous. Indignation at the size of a school's netball court compared to the football pitch provided for the boys can be laughed off, but the suggestion that the great African writers Achebe and Soyinka be removed from the syllabus because their main characters are almost exclusively of the male gender requires more serious opposition.

My second African experience then proved much more challenging than I had anticipated. Once again, however, engagement with another perspective provided an opportunity for re-assessment. Of Botswana, as of all my experiences in every country and continent where I have taught, I can say quite simply:

I came, I taught some, I learned much more.

That education has the power to transform, (above examples to the contrary notwithstanding), is something to which my own experience bears witness. I refer here not simply to the upward mobility afforded me by my schooling and exam success, but to the emancipatory potential unleashed by encounters with Shakespeare, the poetry of the French Classicists, the politics of '68, all described earlier in this narrative. That the transforming power of education, in a school context, depends in large measure on a teacher's view of her role was something I came to appreciate only very gradually.

Teacher types

Cummins and McGinn (1997, 4-10), in the introduction to their invaluable "International Handbook of Educational and Development", distinguish three types of teacher, which they characterise variously as *artisans, skilled workers* and *professionals.* The role of the first, the *educational artisan* or *artist* is described thus:

> *These teachers rely on non-codified processes of instruction and unstructured curriculum. Emphasis is on the quality rather than the uniformity of results. Quality is achieved principally through inspiration or the creative talents of the teacher.* (p.4).

Philosophers such as Socrates, artists like Michaelangelo, even political advisers the likes of Machiavelli provide (somewhat rarefied!) examples of the above. The authors point out that slavish imitation is not the order of the day here. The imitative and modelling process involved replicates rather the language learning processes of childhood,

where "(p)arents are pleased not when their children mimic them exactly, but when they use the language they have learned in unexpected creative ways". The task of the teacher (or the parent) in this scenario is to provide a model while all the time encouraging "the breaking of the vessels" which will allow the release of "the divine sparks" of creativity, of individuality. The old aphorism of roots and wings traditionally in the gift of the wise parent comes to mind here. My wish certainly for each of the students under my tutelage would be a grounding experience which equips them with the skills and the confidence to position themselves as players in their various contexts of operation, together with a curiosity and the desire to engage with the *other,* not in combat but in a dialogic relationship which opens up for each of the interlocutors new vistas of the possible. I would wish to provide a bridge, affording progress to the next stage where the learners' own curiosity and imagination might take them to areas not anticipated, perhaps scarcely imagined, by the parent or teacher. The real test of such an enterprise would be not in the grades achieved by students but in *the use they make* of their acquired knowledge and skills when they leave the confines of the classroom.

All of this finds resonance with the Vygotskyian notion of the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). It is my contention that the concept of ZPD can be usefully extended beyond this theorist's original application (the cognitive development of young children) to my own concerns with the teaching and learning of a second or foreign

language. According to Vygotsky (1978), there are at least two development levels in operation at any one time in the learning process; the actual level and the level of potential development. It is in bridging the gap between the two, the ZPD, that the most effective teaching takes place. In this both teacher and peers have an essential role to play. The metaphor of "scaffolding" (Bruner, 1996) is often used to illustrate this idea. Because of the symbiotic relationship of language and culture in Vygotsky's thinking, there is a reluctance to acknowledge the usefulness of this metaphor in a cross-cultural situation. For me it serves perfectly to explicate teacher-learner roles in just such a context, where the teacher must provide a bridge across language and culture, addressing, in concert with the student, cognitive, social and affective factors which might hinder the process

The second teacher type of Cummins and McGinn follows highly-scripted and controlled methods to achieve precisely-defined goals. The authors call such teachers *skilled workers*.

> *Teachers are called* ***skilled*** *workers because the procedures they follow and the knowledge and skills they teach require special knowledge. They are called* ***workers*** *because their autonomy is limited. These kinds of teachers might also be called technicians, experts in the application of particular techniques.*
> (p.8)

This conception of the teacher requires that teacher-training become curriculum-driven and teachers themselves mere implementers of curriculum content. It is easy to see why this category appeals to

planners and politicians. Uniformity of curriculum together with uniformity of training makes it easier to guarantee uniformity of (measurable) outcome. In such a tightly controlled system, data processing and analysis provide "transparency". Schools and their skilled workers can be held to account if they do not meet curricular objectives. For me, the greatest danger facing a centrally-controlled system with a national curriculum and strict input procedures and output measurements is that it leaves little room for the *teacher as artisan.* The very teachers who inspired me, opened my mind, and taught me never to stop seeking answers to my (perhaps unanswerable) questions, such teachers fare badly in the system just described. I have already noted the difficulty my own teachers faced in presenting the works of Shakespeare to a class of noisy "groundlings" unmoved by the poetry of the language and, unlike the groundlings of old, unable to create their own play within a play in inter-action with the text presented on stage. Today's teachers face additional obstacles. I listened recently to a secondary school teacher articulating her despair at her inability to address the topic of cross-dressing in Shakespeare, raised by a rather shy youngster who may have seen the opportunity to insert his own concerns into the proceedings. The teacher was unable, not on grounds of inappropriacy or lack of expertise, certainly not from lack of empathy, to give time to this (intrinsically very interesting and for one student at least, perhaps crucial) question. Her problem was not one based on educational considerations. It was quite simple. The curriculum left no space for student- centred concerns. Not being

prescribed, matters such as cross-dressing became in practice **pro**-scribed.

The third category of teacher discussed by McGinn and Cummins, is the *professional*, the enabler, mentor, expert in the art of teaching. Unlike skilled workers, professionals construct the curriculum "on the move", matching both content and objectives to the needs and abilities of individual or small groups of students. We can see already why educational planners and curriculum technicians might fight shy of such a conception. In the hands of educators such as these, prescription becomes difficult, control much less rigid.

While offering no overt assessment of the merits of each of the three teacher types outlined, Cummins and McGinn transmit a clear preference for the teacher as professional. A majority of teachers in a British context would probably share this preference in theory. It is my contention, however, that in most educational environments in which I have worked, including institutions of secondary and higher education in the UK, the dominant practice centres on teachers as skilled workers. This was certainly the case for me in the earlier part of my career.

Methodological matters

My "coming of age" in Kenya as a professional (a designation which I dare to claim for myself) was a gradual process, characterised by an increasing awareness, firstly of the inadequacy of the methodology I

was applying to my teaching of language, but more significantly, of its inappropriacy to the context. Having made a successful, if at times stressful transition from home to university, and having immersed myself in the cultures of France and Austria during my university studies, I had been aware of the many adjustments I would have to make, knew it would take time to settle into this new and very different context. Initially, however, this awareness did not extend to my professional life. By taking up a position as a teacher of French in a girls' school in the highlands of Kenya, in career terms I was simply moving from one job to another. I was impressed on my arrival to discover the text in use "Pierre et Seydou" was based in francophone West Africa. However, while acknowledging the desirability of cultural relevance, I made little attempt to adapt my own teaching to the Kenyan context. Indeed, such a move would have been frowned upon. These girls were caught up in a totally imported vision of education. They were being trained to pass examinations set and marked in England by the Cambridge Board. The aim of the school was seen as the achieving of as many passes, and at as high a level, as possible. Anything that distracted from this goal, such as encouragement of local languages and culture, was not encouraged. Exemplar of the benefits of such an education, I became its keen advocate. My position was to change considerably during the six years I spent in Kenya, but at this stage I was content to go on teaching French as before using the contemporary methodology.

It is not difficult to understand the enthusiasm of teachers like myself for the audio-lingual method of language teaching then in vogue, when we consider what went on before. Most of my generation had been taught foreign languages through the grammar-translation method by teachers who themselves had had little opportunity to visit the target language country. Their oral fluency left much to be desired. When the first wave of foreign language assistants arrived at our school I remember clearly my French teacher stumbling to converse at the simplest level with "Mademoiselle". My first exposure to a native German speaker was catastrophic; the man seemed to be speaking a language different in almost every aspect to the one we had been studying for years. My own pupils, by contrast, displayed a fair degree of oral fluency within a very short time. For the first time the foreign language was seen as a living language spoken by people just like ourselves. It was no longer treated largely as a vehicle for textual study. Examination of contemporary language courses reveals that almost every study unit began with a dialogue. (The cassette recorder became an indispensable feature of the language classroom at this stage). This dialogue was usually learned by heart by the students and reproduced with due attention to accent and intonation. Phrases or language chunks were then selected, and drills constructed to give practice in their use. Choral repetition was followed by individual responses, and in many schools, a weekly session in the language laboratory would round off the unit. Apparent in all of this is the influence of behaviourist psychologists. Audiolingualists took their lead from the latter,

espousing the notion that language behaviour is the same as other forms of behaviour, and, given controlled, laboratory-like situations, can be modified in the same way.

> *We have no reason to assume ...that verbal behaviour differs in any fundamental respect from non-verbal behaviour, or that any new principles must be invoked to account for it.*
> (B.F. Skinner, quoted in Richards and Rogers, 1986:51)

The following is a (much-abbreviated) list of instructions for the teacher given in 1964:

- Introduce, sustain, and harmonize the learning of the four skills in this order: hearing, speaking, reading and writing.
- Model the various types of language behaviour that the student is to learn.
- Teach spoken language in dialogue form.
- Direct choral response by all parts of the class.
- Teach the use of structure through pattern practice.
- Reward trial by the student in such a way that learning is reinforced.
- Formalize on the first day the rules according to which the language class is to be conducted and enforce them.

(Brooks, cited in Richards and Rodgers' 1986: 57)

Few language teachers today would feel comfortable with the overwhelmingly prescriptive nature of the above. Critics are able to point to the very submissive role of the learner, restricted to responding to stimuli in a situation, tightly controlled by the teacher to avoid error. For those like myself who had been keen advocates and practitioners of the method, doubts began to creep in. While it was clear that students could indeed be conditioned to respond quite impressively in a controlled situation, there was little evidence of improvement in

spontaneous language production. There was certainly no attempt to introduce the coping skills so essential to language learning, and no account was taken of individual learning styles.

As well as a sense of unease regarding the contemporary methodology, there was emerging a realisation that I was failing to exploit a major resource – the culture of the students themselves. They had so much to bring to the lessons and I, as a teacher, had so much to learn from them. Initially my students were reluctant to expose their culture and experience to this outsider. However, as barriers slowly came down, lively debate about cultural issues, often involving coming to terms with their colonial past, transferred to the French conversation class, replacing the old, time-worn topics, adding significantly to the atmosphere of the class, and noticeably enhancing the quality of the students' French.

Arriving some years later to teach French at an anglophone secondary school in Vanuatu, a tiny country in the South Pacific, I was appalled at the school's failure, in this multi-lingual nation [3], to take advantage of the francophone sector. For all the use we made of them, the French speakers might as well have been living on another planet. Here again was an example of a black box situation, a wholesale transferral of course content and methodology conceived in one particular set of circumstances to a very different socio-cultural context, with scant regard for issues of appropriacy. Having my students in this tiny

tropical country learn prescribed vocabulary such as *chauffage central* and *chasse-neige* or translate a GCSE passage about a man on a tight rope suspended from the spires of Notre-Dame seemed a rather perverse way of engaging youngsters with a new language. And no provision was made within a strictly-controlled syllabus to introduce items of lexis or syntax which would enable them to describe their own everyday experiences. The irony here was that by now the preferred approach in ESL (English as a Second Language) stressed the communicative nature of language, emphasised fluency over accuracy and encouraged students to use the foreign language to express their own ideas. The Communicative Language Teaching methodology had apparently not yet filtered through to GCSE boards in Modern Foreign Languages.

As teachers we all become involved in the task in hand; too often that task is defined very narrowly as exam-passing, and we fail to see our role in the wider context. The narrowness of a school community is something we should be very wary of. This is particularly true when teaching in a developing country. The colonial legacy in many countries has left them saddled with a curriculum and an examination system often quite inappropriate to the needs of the individual student and the wider community. The driving force may have been different in different cases, colonization, missionary endeavour, economic expansion, development aid, but the end-product remains remarkably similar. Bray (1997), Cummins and McGinn (1997) and Holliday

(1994) identify a uniformity of classroom procedure across the globe. It is the task of the teacher operating within these various contexts to find a way to maximise the educational experience of each of the students s/he encounters whatever the culture, whatever the context.

I have iterated my own preferred approach as one which aims to foster in the learner an awareness of the world, as well as a curiosity, which Plato identified as the beginning of the whole knowledge process. The concerns of inspirational educators such as Pestalozzi, Montessori and Paolo Freire bear witness to a view of learning as a process which has at its centre a student capable of taking decisions, making choices, and above all of asking questions. Paolo Freire reminds us (1989, 33ff.) that education should be liberating for both the teacher and student. Teachers too learn in the process of teaching. The curiosity of students can challenge teachers and offer a new perspective, enabling them to reflect critically on their own experience. On the other hand, "by placing limits on students' curiosity, on their expressiveness, authoritarian teachers limit their own as well" (p34). Inquisitiveness, curiosity, the desire to know, must all come from the learner. However, the teacher can, indeed must, encourage this curiosity if students are to attain a level of independence which takes them far beyond the demands of a particular curriculum or the requirements of the next test or assignment, to that point where instruction ends and education truly begins. Teachers in this tradition, and there are many, will see the need to go further than the immediate task, to encourage an interest in and a desire for learning. Language teachers will look beyond the product-

oriented goal of conveying the rules and use of language, and will see their role as teaching students how to learn in a much broader sense.

Operating at the interface

A major problem arises, of course, when the preferred approach of the teacher conflicts with the "folk psychology" operating within a specific cultural group. Since this folk psychology or "theory of the mind" (Torff, 1997:708) encompasses a culture's view of "what knowledge is, what learning is, what characteristics are manifest in the learner, and what education is and ought to accomplish.", it will need to be addressed. I concur here with Holliday (1994:108) who views the issue as central, and not, as is often the case in cross-cultural contexts, a mere "thorny cultural problem" or "constraint".

> *.....appropriate methodology design needs to consider the so-called "constraints" within the macro-environment, not as constraints but as essential features. The existing learning group ideal might remain an ideal, but in the sense of an ideal typology, to be used as a heuristic, designed essentially to be adjusted. In other words, we should not treat the learning group ideal as the operational norm, and cultural factors which inhibit its operation as problems; we should treat the cultural factors as given, and how to make the learning group ideal appropriate to these factors as problematic.*

I examine in a recent article, (McDevitt, 2004), precisely the sort of issues which arise when two disparate cultures of learning engage with each other. My article (Appendix I) looks at the reflections and accommodations required on the part of teacher (in this case myself)

and students (a group of post-graduates at a Gulf university), to negotiate a method which would serve the needs and aspirations of the learners, would take account of their style preference and/or conditioning, without compromising teacher beliefs about the nature and purpose of learning. In the introduction to the article (p.3) I state:

> *Teachers arriving in a new country with strict preconceptions of how students learn, and what they need are setting themselves up for disappointment. This is not to say that years of accumulated knowledge and experience should be jettisoned in a rush to adopt uncritically the philosophy and methodology of a host culture. There will be certain beliefs and values which educational professionals see as core to their craft. My own commitment to learner autonomy* [4] *and the virtues of a constructivist approach to education have been honed and refined over a long period. They remain valid, however, only in so far as they are subject to continual critical reflection and practical verification*
> .

The learning of a second or foreign language involves initiation into a particular speech community or *sociolinguistic* grouping with its pre-established conventions, its accepted modes of communication both spoken and written, and further, into a series of discourse communities characterised by Swales (1990) as *sociorhetorical* groupings with shared objectives [5]. The goal of many of the EFL/ESL students I have taught in developing countries over the years has been to gain access to a global [6] academic and business community. Initiation into such communities requires from the language teacher much more than the transmission of syntax and lexis associated with the language of business; the teacher's role is one of interlocutor, mediating between the cultural position of the learner and the business or academic culture

to which s/he aspires. Acquisition of a language does not begin and end with sound knowledge of its structures. My assumption of the Catholic faith entailed a coming to terms with the (con)text of the mass – the rituals and the language. I had to learn quite simply to talk like a Catholic. My husband's introduction into my family was a stressful cultural initiation, fraught, on his account, with pitfalls, of which I was only vaguely aware at the time. The potential for disempowerment in such situations will be clear to the teacher concerned with a multicultural approach to education.

Kress and Knapp, theorists of the genre approach to language and literacy, affirm (1992: 4ff) that, even in an L1 situation, and contrary to folk belief, knowledge of language does not come naturally. Knowledge of one's native language is an ongoing process of adaptation to the new discourse communities within which we are required to or choose to operate. These authors, together with other social constructionists (c.f. Gergen, 1999) take the view that the structure of text is entirely dependent on the social context in which it occurs, and that a central role of educationists is to assist socialisation into different discourse practices. If this is true of the L1 context, it is likely to apply in greater measure to an L2 learning situation. A central role of the teacher here, (the "adult" in a Vygotskyian scenario), must be to support the learner in progressing from one context of learning (L1) to another (L2). A major part of this will involve helping learners to comprehend and reproduce the textual structures embedded within

their target communities, to *crack the codes* as it were. The appropriation of generic form will be an essential means of entry into the "language games" inherent in such contexts.

> *Our assumption is that it is possible to make schoolchildren* [7] *aware of the manner in which differing social situations lead to different kinds of text, and that by making children sensitive to the relations between social factors and forms of language in texts they will gain a knowledge both about language and about society from which they will be able to generalize, and which they will be able to use productively in making texts of their own.*
>
> Kress and Knapp, op.cit:4

Genre-related pedagogy has aroused the interest of educators in many parts of the world; it is firmly established in the Australian education system. A central feature of the approach is the foregrounding of the intention or purpose of the reader or writer. "Purpose interacts with features of text at every discourse level" (Johns, 1997:25). I have been in the habit for many years now of writing on the board in block capital letters the word WHY? (and this long before my encounter with the genre school). Before every activity, be it completing a simple grammar exercise, skim-reading a text for specific information, writing a summary of a lengthy piece of prose or analysing a poem, I draw the attention of my students to this word and invite them to reflect on the purpose of their undertaking. Not only does this encourage those with a surface orientation to learning to engage at a deeper level with the learning task, it also allows those with a deep approach to recognise that certain activities require a rather more cursory treatment. In other words the WHY? provides the answer to the question HOW?

Inherent in any approach, of course, is the danger of a too rigid, too monolithic attention to a particular, singular aspect of the context of learning. Genres should not be presented as a set of rules to be followed blindly. Rather a critical approach should help learners to decide when to appropriate, to transcend or to reject them. My present dissertation is a case in point. A critical awareness of genre is the pre-requisite for the transcendence of the generic form of academic research discourse. In my transcendence, and yes to some extent my rejection, of the genre, I cannot escape the generic requirement to justify my methodological choice. Even as I subvert, I affirm. Genre rules OK!

The pre-eminence of *context* puts those of the genre school firmly in the Vygotsky camp, where the cognitive development of an individual depends crucially on socio-cultural factors, and in league with social constructionist teachers who see their role as encouraging the collusion of their students in the process of learning at all stages. Von Glasersfeld (cited in Williams and Burden, 1997:1) sets the scene for a constructionist approach to learning as follows:

> *The first thing required ..... is that students be given the reasons why particular ways of acting and thinking are considered desirable. This entails explanations of the specific contexts in which the knowledge to be acquired is believed to work.*

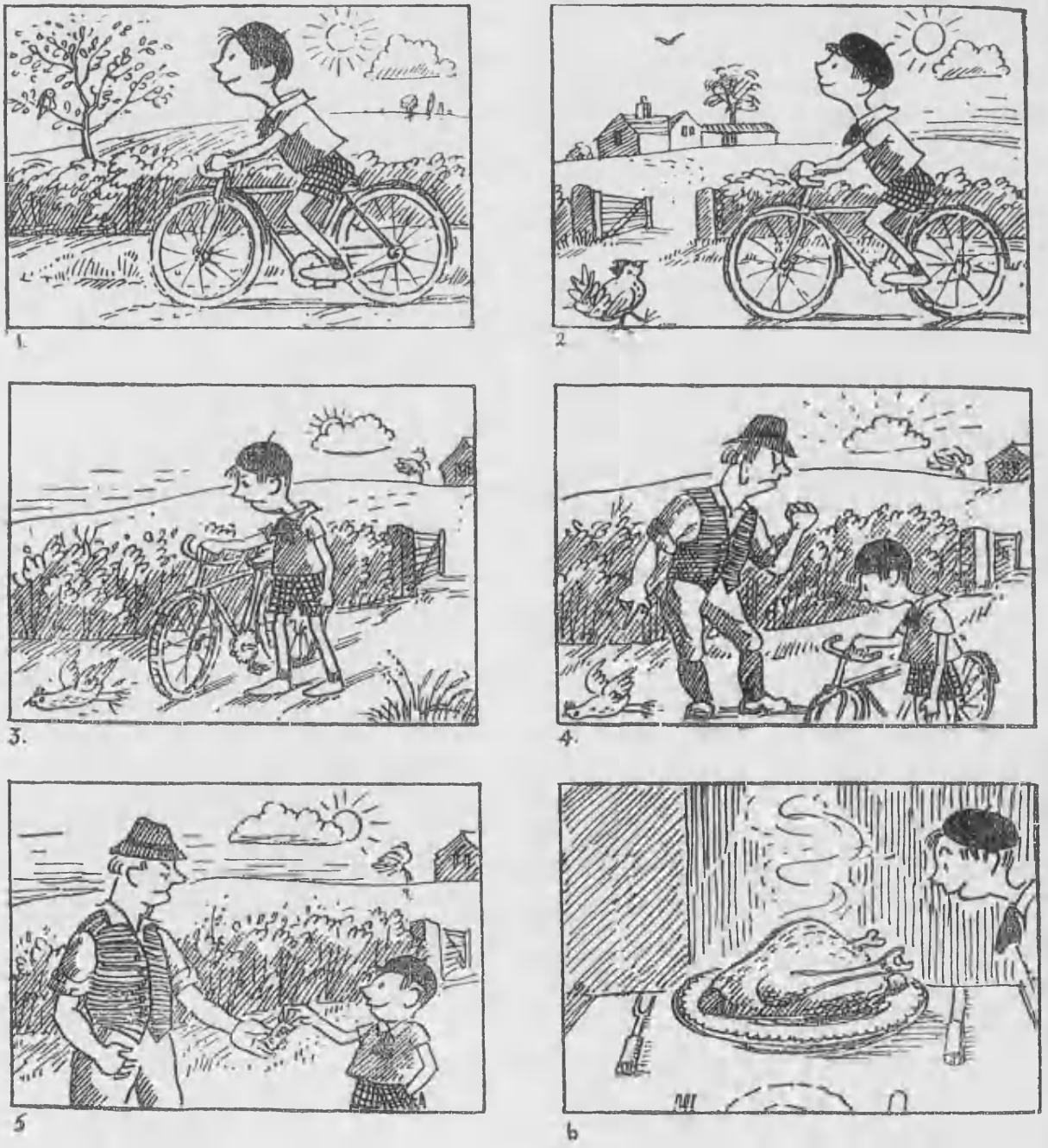
Attention to genre represents a relatively recent re-awakening in Western educational thought to the importance of form in language teaching and learning. The genre approach encourages, for example, a

re-evaluation of the place of grammar in the learning of a language: grammar perceived, however, not as "the intellectual equivalent of a good caning" (Kress and Knapp, 1992: 5), but as a valuable tool in the repertoire of the language learner. Languages, (and perhaps this is true of other school subjects) are often delivered to learners on a "need to know" basis. In the case of the grammar/ translation methodology of my own formative language-learning years the learning of verb tenses often dictated the pace and structure of a language programme. "Do not allow students to move on to the past tenses before they have mastered the present; such a move might cause untold confusion in their minds". "How can we expect them to understand the *passé composé* if they can't even cope with the present simple?" Such attitudes were prevalent. Thus, in contemporary language programmes the whole of the first year might be given over entirely to "mastering" the present tense. I remember the frustration of wishing to write (we never *spoke*) of a past event or foresee a future one, and being warned of the folly of trying to run before I could walk. Fortunately, I never was one to take much notice of efforts to put brakes on my curiosity.

One of my vivid memories of learning French at school is of the introduction, in my second year, of a textbook for French composition: this book was called "Histoires Illustrées" [8]. I remember it on several counts. Firstly, it was one of the few books in our secondary school which contained pictures. Secondly, the illustrations presented a world far from my own, of little children, who to this totally uninformed eye,

somehow "looked" French, and who had regular family breakfasts (*petit pain* and *chocolat chaud)*, set out, (*une canne à pêche à la main*), on leisurely fishing trips, went on woodland walks, had pets, saw farm animals .....

A typical "picture set" is presented below:



Richardson, G. and Fletcher, W. 1951. *Histoires Illustrées* ,p.38

Thirdly, and most significantly, this book represented for me an opportunity to work with the French language, to be creative. Each chapter presented as a stimulus for creative composition a list of "useful" phrases relating to the pictures and designed, I imagine to "lift" the level of production. Participles, present and past, abounded, a plethora of adverbial phrases were arrayed before us, a veritable feast of linguistic possibilities, a wealth of lexis and syntax with which to work,

> **Écrivez** 120 mots environ et inventez un titre.
>
> **Employez** au moins 5 des expressions suivantes:
>
> Par un beau jour de printemps
> Un jour, pendant les vacances de Pâques
> En passant devant une ferme, il . . . .
> Malheureusement
> vite
> soudain
> Sans hésiter
> Après quelques moments
> Deux minutes plus tard
> En montrant le poulet mort, il . . . .
> Après avoir payé le poulet, il . . . .
> Menacé par le fermier, le garçon . . . .
> Prenant l'argent, le fermier . . . .
> Arrivé à la maison
> Au bout de trois heures

(Richardson and Fletcher, op. cit: 39)

..... and yet.....right from the start, pupils were confronted with the warning, written on page 7 of the text, in bold and in capital letters

"If you don't know it; don't use it"

This was repeated at regular intervals throughout the book. Fortunately, the warning fell on deaf ears, and I was happy to lose myself in the world of story-making using the new-found tools of the French language.

The audio-lingual method of language teaching, the methodological discourse community which I embraced enthusiastically as a young teacher, put similar restrictions on procedures. As we saw earlier (pp.71-73), the emphasis in audio-lingualism was on *skills* acquisition. The holism of language, both in form and in function was rendered asunder by its division into four discrete skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening. Emphasis was placed firmly on speaking and listening. Introduction to the written language was discouraged before a deal of class time had been spent on hearing the language, attempting to reproduce its sounds and mimic larger chunks of discourse. No new lexical item or grammar point was ever to be introduced in writing before it had been fully "exploited" in speech. A proud boast among teacher trainees in colleges of education throughout the land was how long they could maintain the interest of a class in the new language before having to resort to writing!

Neither are teachers who claim a communicative approach to language teaching absolved from censure. My own experience as a teacher mentor and teacher educator has provided me with ample evidence of a failure on the part of many to engage with their learners in explorations of the new language in all its (written and spoken) glory, with its potential for self- expression and self-creation. Whatever the intention of the theorists of a communicative methodology, curriculum planners, textbook writers and teachers of a *technicist* bent still contrive to dissect the language into bite-sized chunks which can be served,

digested, tested and subjected to quality(!) control. Oh for a system filled with educators who, far from seeing their role as mere providers of curriculum and transmitters of methodology, enter, together with their students, into a critical engagement with Freire's "pedagogy of knowing"!

Were my teachers, or the writers of the course books, the designers of the curriculum, wrong? At the very least they were misguided. In dampening the intellectual curiosity and the creative potential of their young learners, these educationists were, in my view, eating away at the very soul of the learning process. There were, of course, (there are in any system), many teachers, *artisans and artists* who broke the mould, whose own natural talent and flair inspired devotion and a desire to emulate. There were too the *professionals* who, while seeing their role as conduits for the culture and the curriculum, took a broader view of their task as educators. Such teachers, in the very act of establishing a support system, a "community of mutual learners" (Bruner, 1996), yet anticipated, indeed encouraged, the dismantling of the very "scaffolding" which they were so carefully and conscientiously creating with and for their students.

Notes

[1] Assignment 1, submitted for the module *Educational Policy,* presented a critique of the first White Paper of the Blair government, prepared by the newly-established *Department for International Development.*
Assignment 4 for the module *Comparative Education,* took a historical look at post-colonial education in Africa and the challenges it faces vis-à-vis the agenda of globalisation.

[2] In this failure Botswana is, of course, not alone. Ron Scollon (2001, 140), commenting on the work of Jones (1999, 2000) has this to say. "...there is an all but unbridgeable gap between what public media say about AIDS/HIV or about drug use and the actions and identities of social actors engaged in non-safe sex behaviour or drug use. This gap makes these public health discourses largely irrelevant in producing effective changes in behaviour".

[3]The establishment of Vanuatu as a condominium jointly administered by France and Great Britain had left this tiny island state saddled with a linguistic and, by extension, a cultural situation one can only describe as farcical. With a plethora of indigenous languages and *Bislama,* a Pacific pidgin as the lingua franca, the country was divided into two distinct groups for purposes of administration. One group, Anglophone, Protestant and supporters of the *Vanuaku Pati* was confronted by a second grouping, Francophone, Catholic and supporters of the second major political grouping, the *Union des Partis Modérés.* This division took no account of either geography or cultural loyalties and has been a major factor in the de-stabilisation in the country.

[4] The question of autonomy is one which has exercised the minds of philosophers, not least philosophers of education, for a very long time (witness the recent debate in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* vol. 37, no.1, 2033, pp. 147-184, initiated by John White, and with responses from Wilfred Carr, Richard Smith, Paul Standish and Terence McLaughlin). To avoid misrepresentation, I define my own use of "autonomy" here in the Vygotskyian sense as the level of independence and intellectual mastery of skills and concepts achieved by the learner by virtue of a process of interaction with teacher and peers.

[5] Swales distinguishes the two communities thus: "A speech community typically inherits its membership by birth, accident or adoption; a discourse community recruits its members by persuasion, training or relevant qualification" (1990:24)

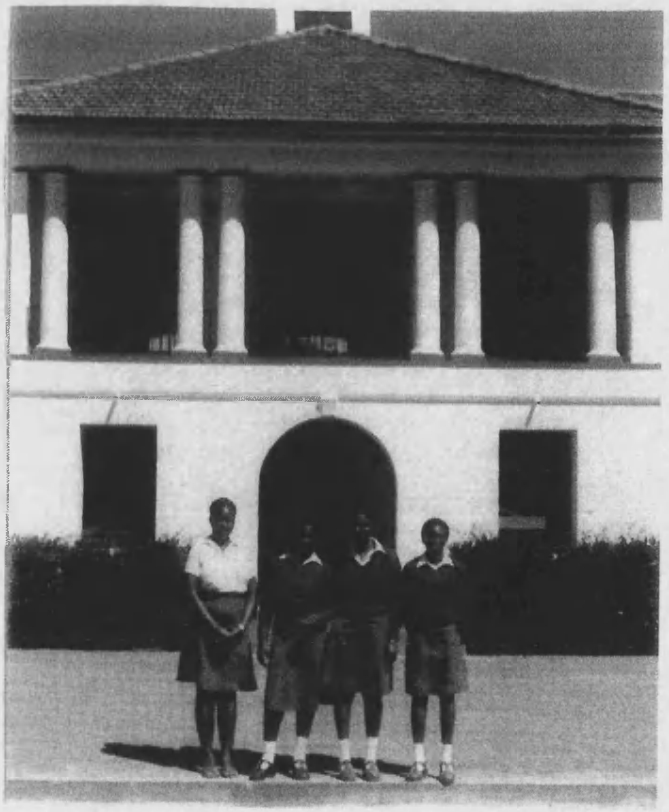
[6] For "global" in this context, read "Western, (indeed Anglo-Saxon), liberal".

[7] I would, of course, wish to extend the assumption of Kress and Knapp to include L2 learners, regardless of age.

[8] The search for a copy of this book brought me into contact with a whole new set of "dialogic companions", for, not content simply to respond to my plea via a professional e-mail list, correspondents shared memories of their experience as pupils and teachers with the book in question, offered advice, comments, criticisms – in the end, I had to declare a cessation of engagement and thank all concerned for their input!

A Pictorial Interlude

"... ... little clay dishes ... used as lamps during Diwali" (p. 45)



"my girls' school in the beautiful highlands of Kenya" (p. 59)

*"... a reticent people with a high respect for **kastom**"* (p. 91)

A discourse "in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (p. 95)

5. Text and (con)text

From an early stage in my encounters with different cultures and folk psychologies an emerging paradox was the similarity of the human experience in each of the contexts of my experience juxtaposed with a constant awareness of the new, the different and the infinitely unexpected. Seven years in rural Kenya, for example, did nothing to prepare me for the poverty and deprivation I witnessed in Kathmandu and throughout Nepal. The convergence in Kenya and in Vanuatu of the Christian faith and indigenous cultural practice brought a new vitality to the dour doctrine of my Presbyterian upbringing and the rigid social conventions of my Catholic adulthood; while the inter-mingling of Buddhism and Hinduism in the daily rituals of the devoted in Nepal was a constant source of wonder and delight. I became increasingly aware that the practices of a particular faith do not always reflect the intentions of its priests and prophets. The centrality of the socio-cultural context in all human practice took hold very firmly in my belief system during this period. It has remained with me to this day, and affects every aspect of my life including my professional and intellectual selves.

My ontological position is grounded firmly in experience, and based on the belief that we are social beings, formed and reformed in a process of engagement with various and at times conflicting contexts of operation. This interaction of the self with the environment is realised typically in linguistic form, in text. Text conceived as actualized

meaning potential (Halliday, 1985) is a result of agency on the part of the individual or group interacting with certain aspects of the context in order to achieve a certain purpose, or perform certain textual functions (acts or thoughts). Abstracting from the discipline of Social Discourse Analysis we can identify contextual features such as, for example, the participants, their gender, age, class, ethnicity, social position etc as well as their purpose. All of these potentially "constitute textual *conditions* of specific properties of discourse" (van Dijk, 1997: 12). The setting too, time and place, speaker position etc. will impact upon the discourse, as will relevant props and accompanying acts, such as, for instance, the physical examination in a doctor/ patient discourse or an exchange of money in a business transaction. The modality of the discourse, whether it is written, spoken or otherwise semiotically constituted also has a bearing. Text thus becomes fused with context.

While many of the above features will be present in any context of operation, however, not all will be necessarily *relevant.* There is an analogy here with the notion of the *I* as both a composite of inter-related influences or selves as well as a linguistic or discursive reference point. In my conceptualisation of the self as an entity which endures over time and space, the contextualised aspects - historic, engendered, political, spiritual etc. – of the singular self which is *Barbara*, will not all be deemed necessarily of relevance to any given situation. At certain times, and in certain circumstances, one or the other will be foregrounded, as in, for example, an act of prayer or indeed the writing of this present text. Similarly, the books on my desk

("props" in van Dijk's scenario) may or may not be relevant to a specific instance of classroom discourse. The fact that I am a woman will be seen by some as of little relevance to my professional role, or relevant only in specific professional contexts. My own view is that there are certain contextual features that pertain in all but the most cursory of discourse exchanges. I have chosen to illustrate with some samples from my own experience three contextual features *culture, gender* and *hierarchical relations* which I view as always and everywhere relevant to an understanding of educational discourse, to be ignored by teachers at their peril. I have undertaken, somewhat arbitrarily, to treat these as discrete discourse features; it will be understood that they are in fact inextricably linked one to the other and umbilically connected to their context of operation.

Sub-text: Culture

We saw in the previous chapter how an interactional, dialogic approach to learning can lead to a working relationship which allows a teacher to employ the accumulated experience of her craft without violating the "folk psychology" embedded in the culture of her students. This approach has served me well. It proved to be extremely effective when I moved in Vanuatu from my post as secondary school teacher of French to my first job in the higher education sector at the country's satellite centre of the University of the South Pacific. The ni-Vanuatu are a reticent people with a high respect for tradition (revered as *kastom* in the local pidgin). My students were reluctant, sometimes it seemed

unable, to question authority, be it the written text or the word of the teacher. This posed enormous challenges to a communicative approach to language teaching with its emphasis on student participation, not to mention my conviction of the value of an enquiring, problem-solving approach to learning. My task was made somewhat easier by the fact that one of the courses I taught was Communication and Study Skills, which made a great virtue of student involvement. What I was trying to achieve with my learners was, therefore, supported by the authority of the textbook. And, what was more, they had to pass an exam in it! Students here were also driven by instrumental motivation; they needed to do well in English to continue their studies at the main campus in Fiji. The key to success for me in this context lay in going beyond the "skilled worker" role of curriculum delivery which admittedly in many cases had short-term success, in the form of good exam passes at the lower levels. Rather I attempted to adapt to the local situation an approach which I felt to be conducive to good learning habits and the acquisition of skills and strategies which would serve the students well in the longer term.

With my ni-Vanuatu students an atmosphere of trust was built up gradually through small-group counselling, language clinics and role-play (initially much of the latter in writing as some students quite simply could not bring themselves to open their mouths in class). Students began to see that there were some study techniques which worked for them better than others, some strategies; recall, predicting,

reviewing, memorization etc. which helped in some circumstances but which were inappropriate in others. A course in language-awareness was established where students were encouraged to examine and compare the structure of the different languages they knew, and where great emphasis was laid on language register (particularly important in a largely oral culture where students tended to transfer directly from spoken to written codes with little attention to form). We succeeded, my students and I, in operating within what Skuttnab-Kangas and Philippson (cited in Ellis, G. (1996: 217) refer to as an "interculture" which combines "compatible elements from both cultures".

Such accommodations go some way to dealing with the dangers articulated cogently and timeously by Phillipson in his 1992 publication "Linguistic Imperialism". Phillipson warned that contemporary ELT specialists were, either naively or quite purposefully, ignoring issues of power embedded in the teaching of English as an international language. His publication aroused much controversy, and led to lengthy debate among teachers and applied linguists, among them Pennycook 1994, 2001, Bisong, 1995, Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996, Canagarajah, 1999. The details of this debate lie outwith the parameters of the present dissertation. Suffice to say that to a teacher/ researcher situated within a reflexive, critical, constructionist paradigm, Phillipson's arguments are persuasive. The hegemony of the "centre" [1] countries in the provision of English language teaching together with an invariably top-down approach to the teaching and learning process are

inimical to the concerns of educators such as myself. What appeals rather is the postcolonial effort to "localize" or "appropriate" the English language (Pennycook, op.cit, Kramsch and Sullivan, op.cit). This encourages teachers and students to recognise the value of English as a means, as a tool for use, not only in the context of the classroom with Western-produced materials and often Western or Western-educated teachers, but also as a vehicle for discussion of and participation in culture, religion and all that a particular society holds dear. The African-American writer, James Baldwin (cited in Achebe, 2000: 433) expresses his own uneasy relationship with the English language thus:

> *My quarrel with English language has been that the language reflected none of my experience. But now I begin to see the matter another way ... Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it. If this were so, then it might be made to bear the burden of my experience if I could find the stamina to challenge it, and me, to such a test.*

Canagarajah, in his 1999 publication, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching* presents from a "peripheral" [1] standpoint experiences which demonstrate how a *pedagogy of appropriation* can become the vehicle for an *appropriate pedagogy* which will "bear the burden" of participants' experience, preparing them to be what Kramsch and Sullivan describe as "both global and local speakers of English ..... at home in both national and international cultures" (1996: 211). The idea that a language is intrinsically good or bad is untenable. Following Wittgenstein and Vygotsky, language is to be seen as a tool,

an essential cultural artefact to be employed, as the great African writer Chinua Achebe acknowledges, "in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new (African) surroundings (2000: 433).

A constructionist, contextualist approach to education requires sensitivity to the folk psychology of all participants. This is true even within a society where teacher and students apparently share a homogenous cultural perspective. Within the UK, for example, the teacher's view, essentially middle class and academic, has often failed to take into account the needs and aspirations of students from a totally different social background. The writings of Bernstein, Bourdieu, Coleman and other contributors to Halsey, Lauder et al (1997) have much to say on this. My own experience of school in the east end of Glasgow in the sixties is largely of a system imposed from above by people who knew little of the day-to-day existence of their pupils. While I am grateful for the changes this education enabled me to effect in my own life, the success rate would undoubtedly have been higher with more sensitive handling of the cultural gap between teachers and taught. The notable failure of Bengali children in the British educational system may be attributable in part to a similar lack of socio-cultural awareness. It is not unlikely that many from the Bengali community have experience of a tradition which, rather than exploring the cultural and linguistic richness of the children's heritage, treats them as linguistically and culturally deficient.

Sub-text: Gender

I have always considered myself a feminist. I am now old enough and, I trust, wise enough to recognise that there are many and varied ways of fulfilling one's female destiny. The many Buddhist, Hindu, African and South Pacific women I call my friends have shattered so many of my Western preconceptions about the female nature. Nevertheless, on arrival in Oman, at the end of the millennium and after almost thirty years of teaching in a wide variety of socio-cultural environments, I did not feel ready to confront a society where, to Western eyes, women are regarded as subordinate to their fathers, husbands and brothers. The prospect of working in the Gulf did not appeal. Yet ... at the turn of the century, the beginning of this new millennium, I found myself celebrating midnight mass with a congregation of Indian and Filipino Christians and a small scattering of Westerners under a splendid Middle Eastern sky. The subsequent awakening on Christmas morning to the sound of the muezzin calling our Muslim brothers and sisters to prayer was the most bizarre and at the same time most satisfying of experiences. On an emotional level then a very good, very positive, very "New Age" beginning. I was still in doubt, however, as to how my intellectual, political self would cope with the reality of the *hijab* and the *abaya* [2].

During my interview for position of lecturer in English at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman's sole university, I was not surprised to find events being orchestrated by a trio of men: one Omani, the Director,

one a Westerner and one an Indian national. My expectations were confirmed. And yet, with these three I had a most productive and positive interview experience. We engaged in dialogue about the advantages and disadvantages of a communicative approach to language teaching, and debated the relative merits of various methodological trends. The only sticky points arose when the (female) Head of Student Services questioned me as to how I might tackle a situation where female students refused to engage in dialogue with their male counterparts or when a classroom debate required reluctant (male and female) students to address one another face to face. I recognised instinctively that this was not the moment to engage in feminist rhetoric.

My first encounter with a class of students was rather daunting. The pristine white robes of the men, buttoned to neck and cuffs, and the austere black garments of the young women students bestowed an atmosphere of undue reverence on classroom proceedings. This did not last long. It soon became obvious that these young students were no more "holy" than the average British under-graduate. True, the resources they had at their disposal to express their individuality and assert their personal and political beliefs may seem extremely limited to Western eyes, but their spirit and sense of humour never ceased to amaze me. As I had learned and relearned throughout my career, I was the one who would have to adapt.

I have expressed the view that the gender factor is one which has to be taken into account to some degree in any teaching situation – in Oman it alters everything. University students here have all attended single sex schools. This, together with the requirements of culture and religion, means that a mixed-gender class has to be handled very sensitively. At SQU there are few opportunities for male-female student interaction. Separate lifts transport women and men from floor to floor. In order that they do not have to pass each other in the corridor, the buildings are designed so that men use the corridors inside the building while women use external "walkways". The male students enter by the front door and sit at the front of the class; female students come in the back door and remain at the back of the class. Mixed group work is impossible in most classes. We know that classrooms are little pockets of culture where much more is at stake than simply the teaching and learning of a particular subject (Coleman, 1987, Holliday, 1994, Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996). Given that the classroom is the one place here where young men and women can "meet" legitimately, there are always factors at work which have little to do with the business of learning English! This poses a very unique challenge for teachers of a quite different tradition. In countries like Oman teachers imbued with Western notions find themselves in a strange position. Sex, religion and politics, for example, are specifically proscribed as topics for discussion. As though these all-pervasive matters can be neatly packaged and set aside! Significantly, discussion on these issues was a regular feature of my experience at SQU with one group. With these

students, a class of English specialists, much of my teaching involved the study of literature in English. The power of narrative to open doors to discussion of all kinds! "A Doll's House" came alive for me as my Omani students debated heatedly, and at times very movingly, the dilemma of Nora, torn between her duty to herself and duty to God and family. The stories of Steinbeck were transferred from rural America to the classroom and, by extension, to the rural communities of Oman.

All societies are constantly in a state of transition. In developing countries such as Oman this transition is telescoped to an almost inconceivable degree. Children whose parents never attended school, many of whom come from villages with no running water or sanitation, no graded roads, spend hours every day in chat rooms, watching CNN or, more probably, American soaps and sitcoms. They spend their week-ends in the village learning the craft and wisdom of their forefathers, and the rest of the week engaging with ideas which undermine at every turn the teachings of their revered parents. This, of course, is the stuff of education; evolutionary and revolutionary, its role simultaneously to affirm and to subvert.

Sub-text: hierarchical relations

That language is value-laden and employed to sustain the power of the *status quo* is something I absorbed at an early age as I listened to the patriarchal outpourings from the Presbyterian pulpit of a Sunday

morning. Sitting beside me was my granny, a forbidding figure in her dour Sunday best.

He thunders from the
pulpit.
The Minister, the Word.
She sits beside me, rigid:
Barbara Green, my
namesake.

Nodding, how can she?
... agree with all that ire?

Where is the Light, the
promised Land?
You know Granny, tell me...
.....
"Haud yur wheesht",
is the usual response,
"it's no fur us tae question".

..... and this
from my granny,
who knows everything.

Granny Green was the dominant figure of my early years. My mother had to work "all the hours God gave her" to implement the meagre and very erratic earnings my father provided, and so my grandmother was the centre of family life for me, my two sisters and my brother. A powerful Glaswegian matriarch who ruled her family with a rod of iron, she might have had the motto

inscribed on her forehead [3]. YET granny was in no doubt as to her true status in society. It was definitely beneath men, well beneath the ever-watchful eye of God and under the rule of the Tory party. Subjugated, like many of her gender and generation by an unwitting acceptance of invitations to Reality and Truth (Gergen, 1999:77), all powerful at home, her destiny as a proud Protestant woman motivated her every action. A perfect example of the power of a culture to stultify.

Culture, gender, hierarchy – Situated, as a working-class Scottish female on the side of the "dominated" rather than the "dominant" in the power struggle engendered by these three, it is perhaps unsurprising that I choose to view them as crucial. However, as we saw in the case of Granny Green, or my Omani students, or Chinua Achebe, the simple dichotomy of *dominant/ dominated* tells us little about the complexity of power relations in any situation. Power structures rely on the complicity of the participants. The writer Salman Rushdie conveys, in his own inimitable way, the need to resist at all times the hegemony of our "culture" if we wish to give expression to our independent, creative selves.

> *What's a culture? Look it up. "A group of micro-organisms grown in a nutrient substance under controlled conditions." A squirm of germs on a glass slide is all, a laboratory experiment calling itself a society. Most of us wrigglers make do with life on*

> *that slide; we even agree to feel proud of that "culture". Like slaves voting for slavery or brains for lobotomy, we kneel down before the god of all moronic micro-organisms and pray to be homogenised or killed or engineered; we promise to obey. But if Vina and Ormus were bacteria too, they were a pair of bugs who wouldn't take life lying down. One way of understanding their story is to think of it as an account of the creation of two bespoke identities, tailored for the weavers by themselves. The rest of us get our personae off the peg, our religion, language, prejudices, demeanour, the works; but Vina and Ormus insisted on what one might call auto-couture.*
>
> (1999:102-103).

The passion I feel for education as a process of change relies on its potential to assist individuals in the creation of such "bespoke identities, tailored for the weavers by themselves". The procedures involved need not be as radical as those adopted by Rushdie's protagonists, Vina and Ormus; the process is best conceived as one of evolution rather than revolution. We have fine examples of how this might be achieved from the colonial period, where education in Western languages (principally English and French) opened the door to a whole new world of information and ideas which allowed people access to the thought processes of their oppressors. It opened the way too for an emancipatory and egalitarian reading of the Christian gospel, one not often highlighted by missionaries of the period, who were the major providers of schooling in the earliest colonial times, and whose influence continued throughout the colonial era and beyond. Bernstein, Hewitt and Thomas (in Allen and Thomas, eds, 1992: 201) describe these unintentional outcomes of the education of colonial peoples thus:

> *They were able to articulate their resistance to foreign domination through turning Western principles of democracy and justice (and sometimes the vocabulary of socialism) against their colonial masters .....*

and the unintentional effects of Christian teaching:

> *..its message of universal brotherhood and equality in the sight of God could be used to criticize the inherent racial oppression and inequality of colonial society.*

Yet another example of education as a process of assimilation,

affirmation and subversion..

Notes

[1] Phillipson invokes the work of Galtung (1980) to divide ELT contexts of operation into "a dominant Centre (the powerful Western countries and interests), and dominated Peripheries (the underdeveloped countries)" (1992:52). The arguments of Phillipson (and Galtung no doubt!) are based on a much more sophisticated premise than this simple division suggests. However, the basic division holds, and has what Phillipson "ideological and structural consequences" (p.192).

[2] *hijab* – the scarf which Omani women wind tightly around their heads to cover their hair

abayah – top-to-toe black garment worn by women in Oman at all times except in the confines of their own homes.

[3] This is the much blunter Scots version of *Nemo me impune lacessit,* motto of the ancient Order of the Thistle. While few Scots will be aware of its origin, it is widely recognised in local parlance.

Part II

Towards
a
"Richer Literacy" of Education
and
Educational Research

Researcher Notes

The second part of this work presents a *quasi* literature review in reverse, post- rather than pre- presentation of "data". It represents in large part a maintenance of the dialectical engagement with the literature which formed an integral part of the biography in Part I. In the first section, *A Discursive Approach: Education as Text,* the literature of education, applied linguistics and discourse analysis is invoked to support my personal perspectives on education and in pursuit of a "richer literacy". This section affords an illustration of what I see as the crucial link between experiential research enquiry and life experience. My engagement with the philosophy and practice of educational research impacts on my own practice as a teacher (and student) of language and culture; my practitioner role in turn influences my procedural preferences and informs my research practice. Without an awareness of the potentially very fruitful inter-dependence of research and practice the first chapter here could not have been written. My present fascination with the theories of social and critical discourse analysis have arisen from my biography. The teaching position I now hold as a lecturer affords me the opportunity to engage with the theory and practice of the discipline, and my growing confidence as a researcher has encouraged me to embark on an analysis of the whole process of education as a discursive practice using the tools of applied linguistics and critical discourse analysis *. My preference for what I

have coined a *Critical-Discursive Pedagogy* has arisen precisely from the essential mutuality of research and practice.

Earlier chapters outlined my personal and professional development as I engaged with disparate cultural and linguistic contexts. Concerns with methodology pre-occupied me at that stage as my experiential knowledge came into conflict with prevailing theories of language teaching. Issues of cultural appropriacy led me to the writings of post-colonial thinkers and to the post-modern conception of the "other". My own background and inclinations brought me to the educational philosophy and the critical pedagogy of the likes of Freire and Giroux. And ...., crucially for my thesis, I began to see experience as the very stuff of research.

Central to the educational enterprise is the age-old philosophical question of how we come to know what we know. As I hope this dissertation makes clear, for me knowledge of self, of the society we live in, and, importantly, the society we aspire to, is to be found in our life experiences, in the stories we construct and the stories we live. The second chapter here *Treasonable or Trustworthy Text?* addresses some of the controversies surrounding the experiential, constructionist, narrative stance inherent in a biographical approach to research.

.....

* This chapter represents a tentative engagement with the notion of education as text; it is an area which I would hope to pursue in greater depth

1. A Discursive Approach: Education as Text

Theory

The symbiotic relationship of text and context posited in Part I of this work is seen as cyclical

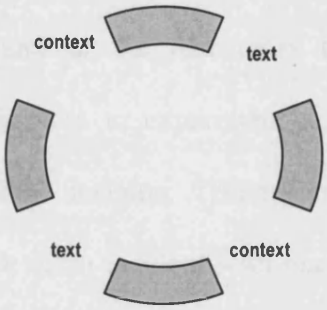


fig.6

The view emerging from my autobiography is that our formation as social beings finds its expression in interaction with others in linguistic form, and the kind of text achieved, the kind of person we become, depends on the context of situation within which this formation takes place; the context in turn will be influenced by the practice of our discourse. The educational (con)text is no exception. Aspects such as culture, gender, hierarchy, discussed in the previous chapter are seen as crucial. This symbiosis of text and context is implicated in the functional approach of Halliday, Kress and the genre school, the work of discourse analysts such as Stubbs in the UK, Sacks in the US, and Reception Theory and Reader-response Theory which developed from Gadamerian hermeneutics. All have contributed to a move away from a structuralist, surface approach to text, all emphasise the symbiosis of

text and context, and the dynamic interaction of participants to the text or discourse. Such approaches from within the fields of sociology, linguistics and literary theory present challenges to thinkers within other disciplines, and have come to be seen as part of a new "mixed genre" known quite simply as "theory".

Theory, according to Culler (1997) highlights the intertextuality of all our experiences and of the discourses they give rise to. Theory represents a willingness to experiment and to remain open to new experiences and new insights. "Theory makes mastery impossible" (p.16). I think here of an incident with one of the Chinese students in my present Discourse Analysis class. Xiaoping, faced with another text and teacher response which denied him the kind of closure he associates with the teaching and learning process, one day simply bowed his head in a dramatic gesture of post-modern Angst and released an expletive which had the whole class gasping and Xiaoping himself covered with embarrassment. I sympathise ... and so it seems does Culler.

> *At times, theory presents itself as a diabolical sentence condemning you to hard rereading in unfamiliar fields, where even the completion of one task will bring not respite but further difficult assignments.* (p.15)

Theory has much potential for research into education.

I am attracted by the notion promoted by Stables (1996, 2002, 2003) that the educational process, what goes on inside the classroom, as well

as the process of educational research, can be viewed as text, subject to diachronic as well as synchronic analysis. The application of theory to education as text permits not only engagement with other disciplines; psychology, ethnomethodology, philosophy of language and literary theory, but also, and most crucially, allows for the employment of the tools of my own particular trade; applied linguistics and discourse analysis. Years of accumulated experience as an applied linguist and language teacher can thus be put to effect in my search for a richer literacy of educational research.

Form and Function

Textual study focuses traditionally on either textual form (a structural approach), or textual function (a functional approach). The study of Classical languages concerned itself almost entirely with *form,* and the Latin class had the feel of a class in Logic or Mathematics. With the rise of cognitive science the study of mechanisms of *processing* took central stage. Of interest was the means by which internal cognitive processes could be transferred from the mind of one individual to another. This is presented in very simple form in the diagram below.

(a) **encoder** >>>>>>>>(b) **TEXT** >>>>>>>>(c) **decoder**

fig. 7

Here, what goes on in the mind of the ***encoder***, finds expression as ***text*** which is then transmitted to the ***decoder*** for processing. Theorising is dominated in this model by cognitive approaches to the linguistic process. The central element in the transmission process, ***text***, is of

interest only in its structural aspects; text is equated with features of syntax, lexis and phonology. Chomsky's theories of transformational grammar and linguistic competence prevailed at this stage in the field of linguistics. Cognitive science and structural linguistics dominated the study of language for a large part of the twentieth century.

Text as social interaction

Whatever goes on at the stages of encoding and decoding, i.e. inside the heads of interactants, while of intrinsic interest, represents from a social constructionist perspective, an entirely inadequate reading of the communication process, inadequate because what is interesting and significant, what demands our attention, is precisely the part that is left out; that is, the whole messy business conducted, not inside the encoding and decoding brain, but at the point of articulation between the two interlocutors, at the level of ***text,*** in other words in social interaction. Since Wittgenstein, understanding language has been seen not as a *process* but as an *ability* or *capacity* (Grayling, 1988, 64ff). Knowing and understanding are not events that go on in the mind; they are enacted in social practices. "If we had to name anything as the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its use" (Wittgenstein, cited in Grayling, op.cit, 66). Wittgenstein talks of "depth grammar" and "surface grammar" (Grayling, op.cit, p.69). Two major linguists of the twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky posited a similar dualism; *langue / parole* in the case of Saussure, and *deep structure/ surface structure* for Chomsky. The concern of

Wittgenstein, however, is not to uncover a pre-existing set of rules, not to isolate an internal processing mechanism which might explain once and for all the rule of language. Rather the "deep structure" of language is manifest in the use to which it is put. Wittgenstein prefers not to theorise at all; for him the trick is to become adept at the moves required in the various "language games" which we encounter in our daily lives. He expresses a somewhat ethnomethodological view of philosophy. "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, - and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us". The aim of philosophy, quite simply, is to "shew (sic.) the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (cited in Grayling, op.cit:71), to allow language to do its work. Austin (1962) had outlined a view of language similar to Wittgenstein's in his *Speech Act Theory*, where he pointed out that language is used not simply to communicate (the *locutionary* function) but also to perform, i.e. when we welcome, warn, promise etc. we are not simply *saying* something, we are *doing* it (the *illocutionary* function). The theories of Coulthard and Sinclair in the Birmingham school of discourse analysis as well as the American social scientists, Goffman and Garfinkel with their view of social interaction as "institution" (see Heritage, 2001), draw their philosophical support from Austin's theory, as well as Wittgenstein's notion of language games.

Discourse Analysis

The discipline of discourse analysis, arising from a functional view of language and heavily influenced by Austin's Speech Act Theory and its elaboration in the work of Searle (2000) requires, in its most catholic form, an inclusive treatment of text; not a rejection of form, but simply an awareness of its limitations. Thus a discourse analytical approach to the Stables metaphor of *education as text* will view the individual lesson which makes up the syllabus and, together with other syllabi, forms the programme, the assessment required to monitor learner progress, the setting, props etc. as situatedly relevant structural components of the discourse. Each can be examined as individual textual features, (lexis), or in concert as part of the overall programme, (syntax). Such a procedure, while providing an absorbing intellectual exercise, will remain, however, somewhat arid, unless, at some stage, (following Austin, Halliday, Kress et al), we engage with the **function** of our educational system by questioning its **purpose.** A deeper engagement will be required in order to unearth the *illocutionary* as well as the *locutionary* force of the educational text, the implicit as well as the explicit intent. This will afford the teacher the leeway, over and above curricular specifications, to deal when the opportunity arises with pupil concerns regarding cross-dressing, or to take account of the lived experience of the African girl-child, often the primary carer in a household afflicted by HIV/ AIDS, and refrain from seeing her simply in terms of an absence from a register of statistics on school attendance.

A further important feature of a social discourse analysis approach to the educational text would be the privileging of the perspective of the learner.

> *Most social discourse analysis focuses less on speakers, and even less on their (non-observable) intentions, than on how discursive doings can be reasonably heard or interpreted, that is, inferred as actions from what is actually said, shown or displayed. In such analysis it is usually the perspective and the interpretation of the other(s) that prevail: discursive activity becomes socially "real" if it has real social consequences.* van Dijk (op.cit: 9)

I have already highlighted (chapter 4) the limitations of the grammar-translation method where text is dissected and analysed in terms of structure, or the audio-lingual method with its division of text into digestible chunks, or indeed the lack of engagement with linguistic structure inherent in the strongest forms of communicative language teaching. In order to communicate, to engage with the "other" in the educational process we need every resource at our disposal. We need structure as well as form, the theories of Chomsky and the insights of Wittgenstein. No voice should be silenced.

Style and Strategy

If as presenters and mediators of educational discourse then, our attention is to be on the "other", the learner, our task to ensure they "get the point" of the text (see Marton below), we will be required to treat them as individuals, taking account of their particular orientation to learning and their preferred strategic approaches to educational tasks.

The findings of a major experiment carried out by the team of Marton et al at the University of Gothenburg and cited in Brown and Atkins, 1988:152ff, have implications for teachers and students as readers of the educational text. In the experiment deep-level learners approached the task, the reading of a 1500-word article, with a view to understanding the thinking and reasoning of the author. They brought previous knowledge to bear on the topic and were prepared to question the author's assumptions and conclusions. Surface-level learners, on the other hand, concentrated on specific facts and tried to memorise chunks of the article. Marton's own description (1984:39-40) of the outcome of the study is revealing.

> *In the specific case we are dealing with here, all our efforts, all our readings and rereadings, our iterations and reiterations, our comparisons and groupings finally turned into an astonishingly simple picture. We had been looking for an answer to the question of why the students had arrived at those qualitatively different ways of understanding the text as a whole. What we found was that* ***the students who did not "get the point" failed to do so simply because they were not looking for it.*** *The main difference we found in the process of learning concerned whether the students focused on the text in itself or on what the text was about; the author's intention, the main point, the conclusion to be drawn.* (my emphasis)

If we, like Marton's "surface" readers, approach the text or task of education like "empty vessels to be filled with the words on the pages", we will indeed have *missed the point.* Concerned, committed educators, we need to engage with our students in a deeper reading of the text, using our joint capabilities "to make critical judgements, logical

conclusions and come up with (our) own ideas" (op.cit, p.40). We will be involved with our learners at every stage of the process as co-creators of knowledge, analysing and synthesising the text, open always to new and fresh interpretation.

Beyond the text

As social discourse analysis has taught us, the immediate classroom context, or text, is only one part of the picture. What goes on in the accomplishment of a particular contextualised task has implications for the wider (con)text. (see van Dijk, 1997, 15 on *local and global contexts).* The summing up of a judge in a court of law has a bearing far beyond the immediate ruling. The words spoken by a priest at baptism form part of the wider discourse of a particular faith community. What goes on between a teacher and her group of students at a specific point in time and space, what we might call a micro-discourse community, is affected by and in turn has an effect on the much larger community of educational discourse outside the classroom. Not only does it rely on and contribute to operational objectives; it is part of a larger ethical dimension. As noted earlier (Phillipson, 1992, Canagarajah, 1999), the privileging of the English language and the consequent downgrading of local languages (and by extension cultures) has served to sustain situations of great inequality. The reporting of World War II, not simply in its exaggerated Hollywood manifestation, but also in school textbooks, led to a demonising of the German people which has repercussions to the present day.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The ethical dimensions of discourse, (and here I include education and educational research), are the concerns of critical discourse analysts, among whom Fairclough (1989, 1992), Wodak (1997, 2001), van Dijk (1997, 2001). Their shared (critical) perspective is to be seen as "discourse analysis *with an attitude*..... biased, and proud of it" (van Dijk, 2001: 96). CDA concerns itself not just with functional aspects of discourse, with speech or text as social practice, but with discourse as a form of power or control. If the Speech Act Theory of Austin and the language games of Wittgenstein taught us to regard discourse as action and interaction, CDA sees texts as "sites of struggle".

> *A defining feature of CDA is its concern with power as a central condition in social life, and its efforts to develop a theory of language which incorporates this as a major premise. Not only the notion of struggles for power and control, but also the intertextuality and recontextualization of competing discourses are closely attended to.*
>
> (Wodak, 2001: 11)

Like Foucault, critical discourse analysts see relations of power as immanent in social relations

> *The thought that there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint, and without coercive effects, seems to me to be Utopian. It is being blind to the fact that relations of power are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free oneself. I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power.*
>
> (Foucault, cited in McNay, 1994: 125)

The aim then becomes one of explication and enlightenment.

Applying the theory

Teacher role

All of the above has implications for Stables' notion of education as text.

Firstly, it will be apparent that in order to foster a deep approach to a reading of the educational text, to the activities in our classrooms, we will need to bring about a qualitative change in our own views of the learning process, and strive to ensure that the system within which our students work is geared towards encouraging a deeper engagement with their subjects of study. If, as research suggests (Entwistle, 1987, Ramsden, 1992), the majority of students work to the level of expectation of their teacher, then a deep approach to learning can be fostered only when teachers adopt a deeper, more reflexive approach to the process of education. We will need to engage with its structural features, the lexis and syntax of curriculum, time-table etc. and to form of these a coherent and cohesive text. At the same time the teacher as *artisan* or *artist*, so influential in my own formation, will bring her creative powers to bear, engaging with metaphor and the poetic features of the text, while the *professional* will be concerned to mediate, to "scaffold" the learning experience, encouraging learners to foreground illocutionary aspects embedded in the discourse.

Learner role

Applying findings on learner style and strategy to the project of education will require not only that we foster in our students a deeper approach to the learning *task*, but that we encourage in them the kind of meta-awareness which allows for appropriate strategy choice. The analysis of a poem is likely to require a different set of skills from the addition of a set of figures. It will be apparent that in the learning of a language there will be some tasks which do not require a deep approach. When learning vocabulary and grammatical structures such as verb paradigms for example, memorization and recall, both features of a surface approach, may be sufficient. Experience tells us, however that, while successful at one level, this approach cannot be relied upon to produce success in the longer term.

It goes without saying that "learner training" – so-called- will be a negotiated venture, and prescription will have no place (see McDevitt, 1997). For me, as both learner and teacher, one study outlined in Marton and Booth (op.cit:39) is illuminating. The authors describe their work on "the apparent paradox of the Chinese learner", i.e. the apparent incompatibility of the two stereotypes of the typical Chinese learner, viz. "the brainy Asian" and "the Asian-as-rote-learner". We know that rote learning is a feature of the surface approach, and yet Chinese students, who apply this technique as a matter of course, consistently perform extremely well in the higher education systems in both Australia and the United States where studies have shown a deep

orientation to be a pointer to success. For the Chinese student, however, no paradox exists. The subjects of the study, all teacher educators, express it thus:

> *When a text is being memorized, it can be repeated in a way that deepens understanding.....the process of repetition contributes to understanding because different aspects of the text are in focus with each repetition, which is different from the mechanical memorization which characterizes rote learning.*
> (Marton and Booth op.cit:39)

My own experience with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, even where the dominant approach to teaching has been very traditional, teacher-led, rote-focused, is that many are able to go beyond the demands of the teaching approach (itself often determined by an examination syllabus). Such learners have reached an awareness that learning is much more than simply meeting the demands of this rather superficial system. They are thus able to vary their approach to suit their own objectives, and consciously select from their repertoire of strategies those which best serve their requirements at the time. This meta-awareness is a defining characteristic of the good learner, the good teacher and the good researcher.

Affective factors

Encouraging a deep engagement with the educational text is, of course, easier said than done, requiring as it does the complicity of learners at every stage of the process. Educationists have long viewed attention to affective factors as crucial to a successful engagement with the educational (con)text; a great deal of attention is given in the literature

to the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In a 2000 article, (Appendix 2), based on a diary which logged my experience of learning a new language, I warned that an awareness of good learning strategies, cognitive and communicative, may not suffice in the face of a set of external circumstances unconducive to the learning process. The anxieties and insecurities evidenced through the medium of the diary as I struggled to learn Setswana during a very difficult transition stage in my life are important lessons for teachers; affective factors can destroy motivation, a prime prerequisite of the good language learner, interfere with the empathy so necessary between the learner and speakers of the target language, and lead to a regression in strategy application. That I, with all my experience of the language learning process, gave up on Setswana after only a few weeks, has much to say about the primacy of motivation in any learning experience.

A Critical - Discursive Pedagogy?

I invoked earlier van Dijk's notion of *local and global context* to maintain that our classroom practice not only presents meaningful instances of social interaction in their own right, but that these daily activities are influenced by, and in turn have an effect on, a higher level discourse or social practice, which we call "education". A discursive reading of education as text perceives it "not only as form, meaning and mental process, but also as complex structures and hierarchies of interaction and social practice and their functions in context, society and culture" (van Dijk, 1997: 6). Such a reading resonates with the critical

approaches to education conceived variously by Bruner (1996), Giroux (1997, 2003) and Freire (1972, 1989, 1994).

For Henri Giroux (1997: 122ff) the principles underlying education must be located "in a larger framework of politics". He abhors (2003: 7-8) the commodification of education, the shift in view which treats it as a private rather than a public good. For Giroux this represents one local instance of a wider, global assault on democratic processes which a critical pedagogy seeks to combat. I empathise with the refusal of this thinker to fall back on binary division, in this case the modernist/ post-modernist dichotomy. I support the approach he advocates in pursuit of consensuality or, like Foucault (op.cit), in opposition to non-consensuality, an approach which retains the best features of modernism while submitting it to a post-modern critique.

> *At stake here is the issue of retaining modernism's commitment to critical reason, agency, and the power of human beings to overcome human suffering. Modernism reminds us of the importance of constructing a discourse that is ethical, historical, and political. At the same time post-modernism provides a powerful challenge to all totalizing discourses, places an important emphasis on the contingent and the specific, and provides a new theoretical language for developing a politics of difference. Finally, post-modern feminism makes visible the importance of grounding our visions in a political project, redefines the relationship between the margins and the center around concrete political struggles, and offers the opportunity for a politics of voice that links rather than severs the relationship between the personal and the political as part of a broader struggle for justice and social transformation.*

Education is perforce a political activity.

> *Education is never neutral, never without social and economic consequences. However much it may claim to the contrary, education is always political in the broader sense.*
>
> Bruner, 1996:22.

Democratic approaches to education embraced by Bruner, Giroux, Freire, among others encapsulate both a struggle against inequality and the championing of human rights. This stance is seen as "utopian"; it is no less valuable for that.

> *As long as people are people, democracy in the full sense of the word will always be no more than an ideal. One may approach it as one would a horizon, in ways that may be better or worse, but it can never be fully attained.*
>
> Havel, cited in Giroux1997:121

The utopian aspect of a critical pedagogy is seen not as a failing but as a strength of the democratic vision at the base of which lies a hope, a belief that we can work together towards a better future. And education has a role which places it right at the heart of this visionary or utopian stance. Paolo Freire underlines it thus:

> *When education is no longer utopian .....it is either because the future has no more meaning for men, or because men are afraid to risk living the future as creative overcoming of the present, which has become old.*
>
> Freire, 1994: 261.

For critical pedagogy, the notion of *hope,* dare I say *faith,* in the future, and in the power of our educational practices to influence this future for the benefit of all, is of the essence. The critical, democratic approaches

of Bruner, Freire and Giroux have an *ethical* and *aesthetic* as well as a *political* dimension, which I find appealing. I have made much already in this work of the idea of education as "co-operatively evolved text". Implicit in such a view is the importance of *voice* and *dialogue,* two themes central to my story and its principal protagonist – the process of education. I have dismissed as inadequate a view of the teacher as technician with a mission to transmit knowledge (reduced here to the level of *information* construed as *curriculum content*) to be absorbed and memorised by the learner. For me, as for Giroux, Bruner and Freire, such a vision is anti-dialogic, and thus antithetical to our shared view of the educator for whom "dialogue is the seal of the act of knowing" (Freire, 1994: 259). The notion of the learner described in a previous chapter as an "empty vessel to be filled with the words on the pages" (Marton: op.cit) has no place in the critical pedagogy envisaged by Freire or in my own discursive reading of the educational text. From the very outset critical approaches to education seek to engage the whole being, giving access through literacy not only to the practice of discourse but to its transformative potential.

> *Learning to read and write ought to be an opportunity for men to know what* ***speaking the word*** *really means: a human act implying reflection and action.*
> *.....Speaking the word is not a true act if it is not at the same time associated with the right of self-expression and world-expression, for creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical process.*
> (Freire, 1994: 256)

This is a far cry from the notion of the educational text encapsulated in a structuralist view of the communication process where the **encoder**, the holder of the message, i.e. the teacher transmits the **text**, the information, the "educational" content to the **decoder** (fig.7) the learner. Such a reading, which underlies some of the misconceived approaches of the past, presents a clear distinction between the active role of the teacher and the passive role of the learner.

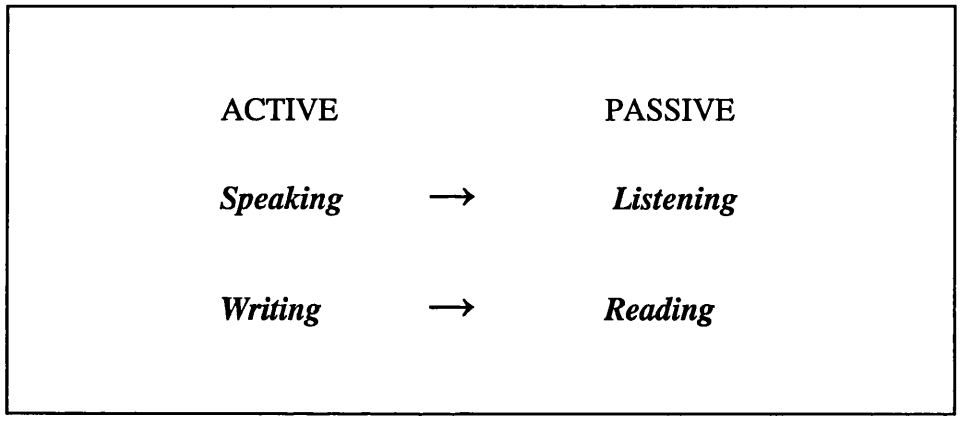


Fig. 8

Fig 8 presents a view prevalent for many years in language teaching. Gradually this was modified and the role of the listener/ reader acknowledged as far from passive. Even here, however, listener and reader roles were seen as secondary, and learners had to be trained in reading and listening ***skills***, which would enable them to "decode the message". Gadamerian hermeneutics "the science of the interpretation of written texts" has had a profound effect on the way we look at text or discourse (Fay, 1996:142). It has taught us that "meaning is only

potentially present in any act"; its actualisation is dependent upon interpretation. Subsequent conceptions such as the "interpretive community" of Fish (1997) and Bruner's (1996) "community of mutual learners" with its emphasis on mutual exchange and support, highlight the social and interactive nature of interpretation and endorse the notion of the co-creation of meaning. Meaning then is dependent not on the deciphering of a code which is the property of the "active" writer or speaker. Rather it emerges from what Gadamer termed a "fusion of horizons". And further, "(a)s the interpretive horizons of various interpreters change, new dimensions of meaning will show themselves" with the result that "the meaning of acts and their products will not only change over time, but will never be definitely realized" (Fay, op.cit: 143).

Education as ethnography

The view of education emerging from my autobiography is akin to a post-modern ethnography, as conceived by Tyler (1986: 125):

> *A post-modern ethnography is a co-operatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is, in a word, poetry – not in its usual textual form, but in its return to the original context and function of poetry, which, by means of its performative break with everyday speech, evoked memories of the* ***ethos*** *of the community and thereby provoked hearers to act ethically.*

Here we see the ethical and aesthetic dimensions highlighted. A post-modern ethnography (education?) provides in Tyler's reading a "performative break" in regular discursive interaction. This break can be equated to the "cultural interface" or "third space" which I have posited throughout as a crucial site for a meeting of minds, a convergence of cultures, a co-constructing of the self and society. Here is a place, as Tyler suggests, for the affirmation of the *ethos* of the community or communities. Here too, however, must be a place of safety where the individual feels free to question that ethos, to discuss, to review and ultimately, if necessary, to denounce.

A discourse analytical approach to education sees it not as preparation for life, but part of life itself, a local manifestation of what goes on in the wider context. As co-writers and co-readers of the text the community of learners will learn how to engage in the struggle for understanding and come to see how their present activity fits into the wider context. Teachers will acknowledge shared experiences and engage with students in making sense of our world. For Purpel (1995: 156) this requires that teachers "infuse personal reflection into the intellectual and ideological dimensions of their work not only as legitimate self-reflection but as a necessary part of genuine dialogue". There is of course, as I have noted previously, a danger that exposure of teacher doubts and teacher vulnerability might be perceived by students as a sign of weakness. Faundez (1989: 32) makes precisely this point:

> *...when you put forward the idea that truth lies in the quest and not in the result, that it is a process, that knowledge is a process, and thus we should engage in it and achieve it through dialogue, through breaking with the past – that is not accepted by the great majority of students ..... For them dialogue is a sign of weakness on the part of the teacher; for them modesty in knowledge is an indication of weakness and ignorance.*

Students must be clear that an approach which invokes dialogue and negotiation in no way impinges on the author(itative) role of the teacher. I make here, of course, a distinction between *authoritative* and *authoritarian*, and would insist that relinquishing the latter need not, indeed must not, lead to a diminishing of the former role. Students need to have confidence in what Widdowson (1987: 87) calls the "transactional authority" of the teacher who will "contrive the enabling conditions for learning (and) monitor and guide progress". We are reminded too by Beck (1995: 135) that "a non-authoritarian approach does not mean unstructured contentless pedagogy". While giving voice to our students, we must acknowledge that a pedagogy that only asks questions will advance us very little. If, however, in answering a student's question I include "some fragment of the other's action, a piece that represents the whole", if, in other words, I respond "metonymically"[2], I will be engaging in a "co-constitution" of meaning.

My discursive reading of the educational text leads me to a plea for an education which is inclusive in every sense, an end to arbitrary divisions between the culture of school and the broader culture outside the gates,

between teachers and taught, between technicians, i.e. the planners, the curriculum specialists and those dealing with education "at the point of delivery". A plea too for an end to the marketisation or "technologization of (educational) discourse" (Fairclough, 1992) which conceals an ideological vacuum, promoting a system which implies "winners" and "losers". Behind the language of "choice" reside large communities of disengaged young people. Just why do we oblige them to spend a large part of their lives inside draughty, unappealing school buildings "learning" school subjects for which they can see no value? We owe students in our schools a far deeper engagement with the educational text.

Notes

[1] If we substitute for "most social discourse analysis" the nominal phrase "my preferred approach to research" we have what represents for me a good paraphrase of my own procedural stance, and further evidence of the integrated nature of educational practice and educational research in the paradigm within which I choose to situate myself.

[2] I have only recently come across Gergen's (2000: 5) notion of *metonymic reflection* which, as is the way when we engage with "theory", raises some intriguing possibilities. It has much in common with the tacit moves which regulate conversation, as perceived by conversation analysis and pragmatics, and is an area of potential interest to applied linguists and discourse analysts such as myself. "Metaphor" having yielded a world of insights into discourse and society (see, for example, Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), I look forward at some later stage to exploring the possibility of applying "metonymy", and perhaps other figures of speech, to the further elaboration of a discursive approach to education as text.

Researcher Note

I would like here, before embarking on this final chapter, to re-assert what this work is not. It is emphatically **not** an attempt to undermine the achievements of science, of the Enlightenment, of Modernism. The social constructionism I embrace takes its stance with the critical pedagogy of Freire and Giroux and critical approaches to research inspired by, for example, Bruner, Gergen, Wodak and van Dijk, where, it seems to me, Enlightenment commitment to democratic processes is radicalised through reflection, critique and a pervasive awareness of the "other". In its inclusiveness a social constructionist approach as outlined in this work acknowledges not only the achievements of the modernist narrative; it welcomes too the re-admission of the pre-modern narratives of culture, tradition, religion. Social constructionism seeks not a rejection but a reappraisal of what has gone before.

> *If we are careful and caring in the elaboration of the constructionist alternative, we shall also find ways of reconstituting the modernist tradition so as to retain some of its virtues while removing its threatening potentials.*
>
> Gergen (1999:31)

Janus-faced, we look to the past as well as to the future for our inspiration. Is it too far-fetched to envisage a return in some form of "Renaissance man" (and, indeed .. woman!) or of the generalists of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - the naturalists and experimental philosophers who bridged the gap between science and the humanities? The great Charles Darwin never called himself a

scientist; Newton was a scientist, a Christian, an alchemist. During my residence as a student at the University of Aberdeen in the 60s, the study of Physics was still called Natural Philosophy; at its inception this scientific discipline had the notion of God at its centre.

In our rush to embrace a social constructionist future let us not forget the achievements of the past, acknowledging, for example, Enlightenment concerns with rigour and reason, re-constructing reason in our own deliberations, however, as a communal or, as Gergen (2001) would have it, a "relational" activity. An ecological perspective urges us to face the challenge of "re-orientating cultural practices in a manner where what has proven ecolologically sustainable is valued over what is new, experimental and unproven" (Bowers, in Kohli, 1995: 311) *.
Let us not neglect other cultural practices that have achieved an ecological validity which is the aspiration of many late 20th and early 21st century thinkers.

* The views of environmentalists and ecologists have received little attention in this work – not, emphatically not because I do not view them as worthy of consideration. Rather, like my student Xiaoping (see p. 108) I feel the need to pause for breath in my engagement with new perspectives. Critical theory demands engagement, but that will be for another day, and another study .....

2. (In) conclusion: "Treasonable or Trustworthy Text"?

This dissertation began, with Stenhouse, in the search for a "richer literacy" of educational research. A narrative or autobiographical approach was posited as an alternative to the "sterile dichotomies and questionable paradigms" of much of what counts as research into education. As the biography has evolved, what has emerged as constant is a yearning for a "richer literacy" not just of approaches to research into education but to the educational enterprise itself. Stenhouse argued for a symbiosis of research and practice, for theory relating directly to and building on educational praxis: "not a sociology, nor a psychology, but a pedagogy" (1985: 41). Our lack of ease in anglophone cultures with the term "pedagogy" reveals long-standing reluctance within the educational community to ally the "science" of education with the practice of teaching. Such an alliance, however, is precisely what is required in a social constructionist approach. As we saw earlier (pp. 17-18) the symbiotic relationship of research and practice can go beyond the reflexivity of action research as outlined below.

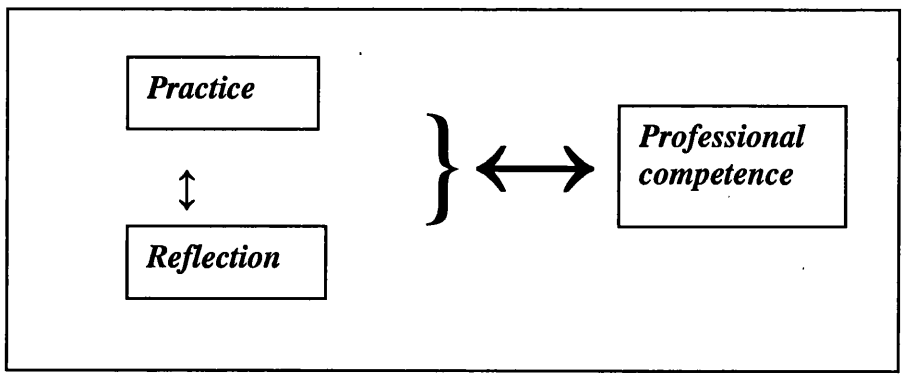


fig.4

..... to include ***theoretical knowledge***, presenting a holistic cyclical approach in which experience deriving from practice forms a narrative, which in turn forms the basis of educational theory, and is itself informed by that theory through a dynamic and ongoing process of dialogue (fig. 5)

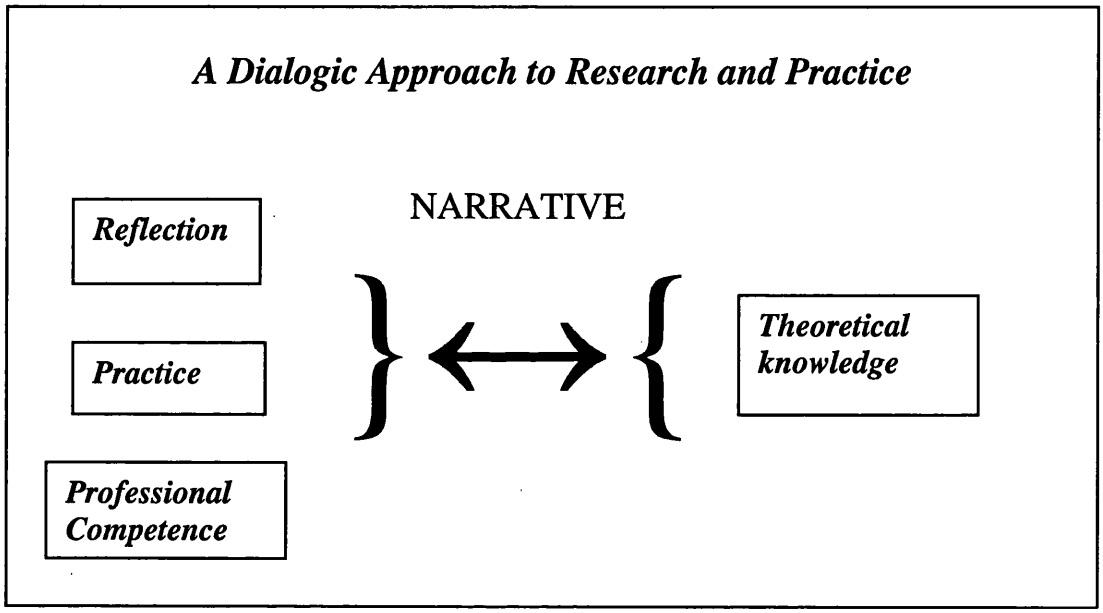


fig. 5

Controversy surrounding a narrative approach centres on the subjective nature of the data assembled, author bias, and a lack of generalisability of any findings. The concept of *generalisability* has long been contested within qualitative methodologies. Edge (1998: 351) puts a linguistic slant on this when he claims that the illocutionary force of the

research outcome is no longer "I explain and thereby (globally) suggest" but rather "I interpret and thereby offer a (context-specific) understanding".

The myth of objectivity

Today, many, if not most, researchers, (even, following Kuhn, within the physical sciences) [1], view the notion of objective, value-free research as a chimera. The Feminist sociologist, Judith Aldridge (1993: 54) criticises accounts of quantitative research which "textually disembody the knowledge contained from its time, place and person of production", while bravely conceding her own previous complicity in the process.

> *Most sociologists present research account writing as referential in a straightforward way of the research process – a particular set of events in time. My thesis was no exception. According to the chronology of events as outlined in its text, ostensibly I as a researcher: studied a body of literature; discovered a gap in that literature – some hypotheses as yet untested; chose a survey as the suitable method to test these hypotheses; assembled the relevant measures; collected data; analysed the data as an appropriate test of my hypothesis; and, finally, drew fitting conclusions.*

Aldridge goes on to argue that the entire account of her research was nothing more nor less than "an artifice or construction".

> *The hypotheses made in the thesis were not, in fact, derived from the literature as the thesis account suggests, but from hunches and personal experiences. And, the data were gathered before I even read the literature. Faced then with a large data set, and lacking a clear set of questions with which to interrogate the data, I finally approached the literature in order to find hypotheses that could be derived*

> *from it, and that could be sensibly, realistically and legitimately, be (sic) tested with the existing data.*

Who among us cannot identify with this?

What is significant in Aldridge's narrative is that the author does not reject her initial text; rather, in the spirit of social constructionism, she talks of it as an "alternative account", one possible, partial recounting of the procedures, limited, in this instance, by the "politics and academic leanings" of the department in which she worked, and from whom she was seeking academic recognition. From her new perspective Aldridge would almost certainly have proceeded differently. This, of course, in no way invalidates her research project; choice of procedure is dictated by the theories available at the time.

Daniel Bertaux, another (previously cited) convert to the transformative possibilities of post-positive research paradigms likewise rejoices in the potential they unleash.

> *If social* ***science*** *is not possible, it does not mean that social knowledge is an illusion.....The task of sociological thinking should not be to find "social laws" (does one know of a single one?), but to help along the tendency towards* ***progressive elucidation of the historical movement of social relations.*** *For this we need critical thinking, more than we do positive thinking (which we do need as well). We need Marx's method of thought as well as a critique of institutional Marxism. We need sociological thinking and we need a critique of established sociology as a separate institution. We need everything we can use, including what finance capital knows (and does not reveal), what the people know (and cannot reveal), what intellectuals know (****if*** *they know anything).*

The texts of both Aldridge and Bertaux exhibit an enthusiasm for the emancipating potential of a reflexive approach to accepted orthodoxies of methodology and epistemology. For researchers equipped to take up the challenge Fay's (1995:20) reconceptualisation of objectivity as "critical intersubjectivity", encapsulating as it does the notions of reflexivity and dialogue, opens up more promising territory.

Reflexivity

Post-modern approaches, Feminist epistemology in particular, view reflexivity as fundamental, not just at the stage of gathering/"producing" data, but at the crucial stage of analysis and critique. For Stanley (1990: 209) Feminist theory derives from *experience* "whether this is experience of a survey or interview or an ethnographic research project, or whether it is experience of reading and analyzing historical or contemporary documents," and its analysis centres on

> *an explication of the "intellectual biography" of the Feminist researcher/theoretician..... (producing) accountable knowledge, in which the reader would have access to details of the contextually-located reasoning processes which give rise to "the findings", the outcomes.*

Only through a constant and conscious foregrounding of reflexive processes which engage and challenge the reader can the presentation

and analysis of experience be rendered trustworthy. Narrative accountability is achieved in large measure through a critical reflexive stance towards both the epistemological underpinnings (theory) and the contextualised dialogue and interaction (practice) revealed in the work. The biographical narrative gains further authentication through self-positioning within the discourse. Central to this is the notion of the executive, reflective self, discussed at length in Part I Chapter 3 of this dissertation. This self allows me to stand outside myself, and, through reflection, select and reject what is required for me to construct my own frame of reference, to live and to tell my story. This crucial aspect of our being is what Fay (1996: 35) calls "self-consciousness".

> *A self-conscious creature is one which is itself the object of its own reflections and assessments. It knows that it forms certain beliefs or desires certain things, and scrutinizes its own perceptions, wants, and opinions and the basis on which they are formed. (Indeed a reflective creature might well evaluate in second order beliefs and desires on the basis of some third undertones. it might demand, for instance, that its ideals be justifiable in some way. It might even have fourth-order beliefs and desires about its third-order ones; it might propose a novel conception of what justifiably consists. Third and fourth order reasoning is in part what philosophy is.*

If this self-consciousness is at the heart of a search for philosophical truths, it provides too a sound ethical basis for critical research. The intellectual biography lays no claim to the revelation of causal mechanisms so dear to the hard sciences. Its epistemological basis excludes the possibility of validating features such as replicability and

generalisability. It does more, however, than focus on just one person. The search for self becomes an active and dynamic form of **re**search as it subjects itself to an engagement with other selves, embodied either in the same persona, as in autobiography, or in the person of others. In no way is this self-searching or search for self a narcissistic procedure. We are social beings through and through and our potential selves are realised through social interaction which moulds our world view. The reflexive biographical process unveils the social practices which structure the self and which are, in turn, themselves structured by the interaction of a multiplicity of selves. Critical, reflexive engagement and dialogue allow us to re-evaluate our world view, once again to affirm or subvert.

Tolerance of ambiguity

The socially-constructed experiences revealed in the present autobiography are characterised as complex and fragmented. The autobiographical narrative, including the embedded, reflexive meta-narrative, brings coherence and cohesion to the world of experience, shedding light on its workings, providing insights on its complexities, adding to the knowledge base which allows us to go on. Researchers operating in this environment need to be able to tolerate a high level of ambiguity, and be willing to take risks. These two characteristics are shared by the good language learner. Success in the field of language learning is often dependent on experimentation, on the willingness to take risks. Restricting the language learning process to mechanistic efforts at syntax and vocabulary acquisition is doomed to partial

success; the rich descriptive and communicative powers of language require a more open orientation. Thus it is with educational research. Our context is thick and rich; a mere skimming with the tools of science will scarcely break the surface.

It is my view that in our personal and professional lives as well as on the wider stage, we must seek, not to suppress the ambiguities we encounter, but to face them, not to shy away from the risks of engagement with those of a different socio-cultural bias, but to embrace them. We must call an end to the so-called "science wars", rebuff the notion of a "clash of civilisations" with its (so recently witnessed) inevitable consequences. As Rom Harré asserts in his foreword to the Parker (1998) edition *Social Constructionism, Discourse and Realism* "We must assume that the world is richer than we know" .... and, I would add, rejoice in this.

Trustworthiness

Thomas (op.cit), an advocate of teacher research, appears to acknowledge the unease surrounding the narrative mode in his chapter heading "Treasonable or trustworthy text: Reflections on teacher narrative studies", from which my present chapter takes its name. In the manuals of research the notion of "trustworthiness" finds expression in the guise of validity, reliability, generalisability, all remnants of a scientific, empiricist approach. Many post-modern thinkers view the

whole concept of validity as inappropriate, given the contextualised nature of knowledge. Others confront the dilemma by proposing relative or qualified validities – interrogative validity, situated validity, transgressive validity [2]. Lincoln and Gubba (cited in Edge and Richards, 1998:345) relate this issue of "trustworthiness" to the concepts of "truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality" and have devised a useful set of naturalistic criteria to take account of these (fig.2).

Underlying concept	Rationalist criterion	Naturalistic criterion
Truth value	Internal validity	Credibility
Applicability	External validity	Transferability
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability

fig.2

For Mischler, (cited in Lieblich et al, 1998: 172) "trustworthiness" is dependent on the evaluation of a community of researchers:

> *Focusing on trustworthiness rather than truth displaces validation from its traditional location in a presumably objective, non-reactive and neutral reality and moves it to the social world- a world constructed in and through our discourse, and actions, through praxis.*

For me the most interesting aspect of the insistence on trustworthiness is the implied necessary collaboration, totally absent from the positivist

perspective, of the researcher with her audience. This dialogue between researcher and reader is one vital nexus for the authentication of the research narrative. I return to this shortly.

Jerome Bruner (1990) posits two modes of cognitive functioning – *paradigmatic thought,* which is used to present context-free propositions through a process of logical, linear reasoning, and *narrative thought,* which presents contextualised, interactional "reality". The former is subject to verification while the latter aims at verisimilitude, lifelikeness, plausibility. Like Jerome Bruner (2001) I see the plausibility of narrative accounts as dependent on two characteristics: "they should center upon people and their intentional states: their desires, beliefs and so on, and they should focus on how these intentional states led to certain kinds of activities" (page 28). In other words, they should provide a credible and coherent articulation between intentionality and activity, theory and practice. Central to Bruner's views and indeed to my own social constructionist perspective is the requirement for **both** types of thinking in our quest to make sense of our world and of our place within it.

Voice

A good example of the value of an "also-and" rather than an "either–or" approach to research and practice is to be found within one of my own areas of special interest, development education. On the question of, for example, gender equity, few will deny that much data of great

value has been gathered via the use of quantitative methods. We now have a much clearer idea of the situation in terms of numbers of male and female school enrolments in various regions of the developing world. We may even have some idea of the possible causes for any disparity; questionnaires and interviews will have yielded some useful insights here. But our children are not numbers, not mere statistics on a World Bank register. They are living, breathing, socially- culturally-, environmentally-constructed, gendered beings. Only by dealing with them as such, by listening closely to the stories they have to tell, can one begin to piece together a picture of what it means to be a girl child living, for example, in an impoverished HIPC * in sub-Saharan Africa, what pressures are involved and what expectations one can realistically have. Giving voice to multiple participants in research projects has opened the eyes of many researchers to data which could never have been uncovered using traditional methods reported in the voice of the researcher alone.

Post-modern perspectives have allowed for the inclusion of a myriad of hitherto silenced voices, for the narrating of stories hitherto untold. Dialogic approaches encourage intersubjective engagement in the so-called "third space" where each has a hearing and none is privileged. This dissertation can be seen as giving space to voices from both inside and outside the field of education, from my experience as a teacher and

* heavily-indebted poor country

researcher as I pursue my engagement with the "other" through the discourse of everyday encounters within the classroom and in a wider educational and academic context with other interlocutors, in person or through their writings. And all of this in pursuit of a rich and enriching pedagogy which combines both research and practice.

The active reader

Educational research is by its nature a collaborative, interpretive process where a critical dialogue is maintained between the researcher and the researched. A further participant in the dialogue highlighted throughout this work as critical to the validation of the research narrative is the reader. The symbiotic relationship between writer and reader is axiomatic. Failure to acknowledge this has led to what Laurel Richardson (in Denzin and Lincoln (eds), 1998: 346) calls the "dirty little secret" of much research in the social sciences, viz. that most of it is quite simply "boring". The Communication Skills and Academic Writing courses once central to my own teaching repertoire preach a need for reader-oriented texts with the onus firmly on the writer to communicate the message in a clear and interesting manner. Meanwhile, writers of research continue to churn out dull, sterile accounts which do scant justice to the time and energy expended on the enquiry process. Despite the intrinsic appeal of its subject matter and the commitment and talent of many contributors, acres of writing languish unread on library shelves. Research that is unread can claim little status beyond that of personal and professional development. Its

wider significance depends on its acceptance by collaborators, colleagues and the research community as a whole; it goes without saying that it is in the interest of the researcher/writer to produce a text which is at the very least readable.

The writer almost invariably has a reader in mind when creating her text. In the case of the researcher it is likely to be a community of peers. In general, the writer of research will be working within the parameters of her chosen paradigm; in the case of the narrative researcher, and in contrast to other approaches, a crucial requirement will be to encourage reader awareness of the textuality of the research text, drawing attention to rhetorical devices, textual conventions, the contrived and fictive nature of the discourse. Part of the task of the critical and creative researcher/writer will also be to see beyond these set horizons, to question the paradigm, explore its limitations, stretch its boundaries. Similarly the critical reader will expect to engage with the writer in a dialogue through the text and beyond. Others, not targeted by the writer, will bring whole new perspectives to bear on their reading of the text. They too will engage with it, taking from it what is deemed valid and appropriate to their contexts. For the reader the research text will find its validation in the extent to which, in a Gadamerian "fusion of horizons", it resonates with his or her own perspectives and experience.

If, as a practitioner in the educational process I seek a "pedagogy of knowing" within the context of "a community of mutual learners", so too my stance towards research into education welcomes insights from a variety of "interpretive communities" (Fish, 1997: 207) in which, as in the discourse communities of Swales, Kress, Goffman et al (see Chapter 4), inhere a set of tacit, constitutive properties rendering them subject to normative regulation within the discourse. The problem here, of course, as Fish recognised (op.cit: 209), is how we are to recognise, in order to appeal to, other members of the community we embrace; - and the answer – we can't!

> *The only 'proof' of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: "we know". I say it to you now, knowing full well that you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me.*

True, but this is certainly not the end of the story. Part of my job as a researcher and a writer of research, as with my role as a teacher, has been to "scaffold" you the reader, to present my text and my thesis in such a way that it affords you entry into what may be for you a new literacy of education and educational research. Ultimately, it is for you to choose to accept or reject, to affirm or subvert.

Notes

[1] In his 1970 publication *The Structures of Scientific Revolution* Thomas Kuhn pointed out that, contrary to positivist claims, scientists do not operate an inductive, objective, value-free approach to research; they are heavily, and inevitably, influenced by the paradigmatic preferences of the community within which they situate themselves. There is a disavowed divergence between their methodological claims and their practice. (source: Scott and Usher, 1999: 15).

[2] See Altheide and Johnson *Criteria for Assessing Interpretive Validity in Qualitative Research* in Denzin and Lincoln (eds.): op.cit., pages 283-312, for a full discussion on this topic.

Afterword

An exercise in truth telling.....

This was the claim made for my text at the outset.

A bold claim, arrogant, absurd even, given my acknowledgement of the contested, contextualised nature of *truth*?

I think not.

For, as St. Paul would have it, "... we know in part, and we prophesy in part".

The glass through which we see, darkly, is the lens of our culture, our gender, our experience. Once we accept this, we are freed to explore the rich depths of our shared human experience. Our greatest enemy in our quest is certainty, the fundamentalist conviction that we have the answers. Whichever faith community we embrace, whether religious, humanist or scientific, our vision will always be clouded by fact of our own human nature.

An exercise in truth-telling.....

It is in the effort, the quest, the *exercise,* that aspects of the "truth" are perceived.

"When Hermes took the post of messenger of the gods." (Crapanzano, 1986: 53), "he promised Zeus not to lie. He did not promise to tell the whole truth. Zeus understood".

Appendices

Appendix I

(Pages 148-155)

Negotiating the Syllabus: a win-win situation?

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Negotiating the syllabus: a win-win situation?

Barbara McDevitt

This article examines some of the issues that arise when two disparate cultures of learning engage with each other. It draws on various theories of language pedagogy and cultural appropriacy to suggest how such issues might be resolved. A snapshot of a specific teaching experience at a Gulf university is presented to illustrate some of these theories in action.

Introduction

It is axiomatic that the Anglo-Saxon perspective dominates the journals of research in the social sciences; education is no exception. The same might be said of the practice of education, or more precisely schooling, which, in much of the world, also reflects a Western perspective. A look inside a classroom in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas, and much of Europe, will present a picture instantly recognizable to us all (Bray 1997). However, ESL teachers operating within these various, apparently familiar contexts may find that the surface similarities conceal a minefield of issues which, unless addressed, can greatly hamper the teaching and learning process in their classroom. Teachers arriving in a new country with strict preconceptions about how students learn, and what they need, are setting themselves up for disappointment. This is not to say that years of accumulated knowledge and experience should be jettisoned in a rush to adopt uncritically the philosophy and methodology of a host culture. There will be certain beliefs and values which educational professionals see as the core of their craft. My own commitment to learner autonomy and the virtues of a constructivist approach to education have been honed and refined over a long period. They remain valid, however, only in so far as they are subject to continual critical reflection and practical verification.

The learning process

A teacher perspective

I have stated elsewhere (McDevitt 1997) my view that 'the end-product of all education should be an independent learner'. There is, of course, nothing new in this. The Socratic method of inductive teaching, Comenius' conception of education as a preparation for life, and in the twentieth century the concerns of inspirational educators such as Pestalozzi, Montessori, and Paolo Freire—all bear witness to a view of learning as a process which has at its centre a student capable of taking decisions, making choices, and above all of asking questions. Paolo Freire reminds us (Freire and Faundez 1989: 33ff.) that education should be liberating for both teacher and student. Teachers too learn in the

process of teaching. The curiosity of students can challenge teachers and offer a new perspective, enabling them to reflect critically on their own experience. On the other hand, 'by placing limits on students' curiosity, on their expressiveness, authoritarian teachers limit their own as well'. (Freire and Faundez op. cit.: 33). Inquisitiveness, curiosity, the desire to know, must all come from the learner. However, the teacher can, indeed must, encourage this curiosity if students are to attain a level of independence which takes them far beyond the demands of a particular curriculum or the requirements of the next test or assignment, to that point where instruction ends and education truly begins.

A student perspective

What if our students do not share this view of the teacher/learner relationship?

Learners in many parts of the world are often uneasy with the notion of negotiation and dialogue, seeing it as a sign of weakness on the part of their teachers (Freire and Faundez 1989).

Student perceptions of teacher status is an issue which the learner-centred teacher may have to confront in many different parts of the world. Holliday (1994: 84), discussing his experiences at an Egyptian university, describes one Ph.D holder's belief that his students could not conceive of learning unless he was teaching, i.e. giving factual information. A local lecturer sought to explain the matter thus:

> (He) said that one reason why the discovery approach would be difficult for local students was that in Arabic the concepts 'teach' and 'teacher' are converses of 'learn' and 'learner': like 'buy' and 'sell', one cannot happen without the other. Whereas in English it is possible to say that one has 'learnt' something without having had a teacher, in Arabic one would have to qualify 'learnt' with 'by myself' to make the absence of a teacher clear. Whereas in English it is conceivable to be a 'teacher' without necessarily having taught effectively (without having students who have learnt) e.g. through incompetence, in Arabic being a teacher implies that you have students who have 'learnt'.

Holliday reports too how one group of Egyptian students saw a junior lecturer's preference for the discovery method of teaching as indicative of her lack of qualification as a 'real teacher'. Arab students in Oman would find empathy with such views. For students here the teacher is an authority figure to whose greater knowledge learners defer.

> The teacher is expected to pass on what s/he *knows* ... any suggestion that a better result might be achieved through reflection or discussion is met with incomprehension. As they try to improve their competence in the English language, a language teeming with exceptions and ambiguities, my students will frequently pose the question WHY? But why teacher, why do you say this? write that? why, teacher? why? My students' 'WHY?' however, is, in effect a 'WHAT?' They are not enquiring into the etymology of a phrase or structure, not requesting an analysis of a stretch of discourse; they simply want to know the rule, the grammar rule. For them the learning of rules, and frustratingly but necessarily, their exceptions, is the way to learn a foreign language. The job of the teacher,

as a knower of rules, is to communicate these to the students, provide opportunities for the students to practise them and test them so that they, too, can become knowers. Their view of the teacher is essentially that of 'skilled worker' (Cummings and McGinn op. cit.: 8).

Approach to the learning task

Students here have come from a culture of schooling which appears to encourage by its teaching methods, and reward via its system of assessment a surface or serialist approach to learning. Bajunid (1997: 435) points out that throughout Islamic history Muslim children have been encouraged to recite the Koran repetitively; a special respect is owed to one who is Al Hafiz, that is, who can recite the Koran effortlessly and flawlessly. The temptation here is to assume that this leads to a surface approach to a very central formative task. However, while many linguists, most notably Chomsky and Krashen, assign the tactic of memorizing chunks of unanalysed language to the scrap heap of Behaviourist history (see Rod Ellis 1985), others such as Guy Cook (1994: 133–41) view the strategies involved in learning formulaic speech, the strategies of memorization and imitation, as valuable learning tools. Cook sees contemporary Western culture as unusual in the lack of importance it gives to the form of language. He argues a very cogent case for re-instating repetition and learning by heart in the repertoire of language-learning strategies. He makes the point too that the learning of formulaic utterances in a foreign language is likely to bear fruit:

> Those children who learn sections of the Koran by heart do not necessarily go on to learn Arabic; but for those who do it seems reasonable to suppose that this rote knowledge is a considerable advantage. (p. 138)

We cannot even assume, as does Rod Ellis (op. cit.), that formulaic speech has merit only in the early stages of second language learning. Marton and Booth (1997) describe their work on the 'apparent paradox of the Chinese learner', i.e. the apparent incompatibility of the two stereotypes of the typical Chinese learner, viz., 'the brainy Asian' and 'the Asian-as-rote-learner'. We know that reliance on rote learning is a feature of the surface approach to learning, and yet Chinese students, who apply this technique as a matter of course, consistently perform extremely well in both Australia and the United States, where studies have shown a deep orientation to be a pointer to success. For the Chinese student, however, no paradox exists. The subjects of the above study—a group of Chinese teacher educators—express it thus:

> When a text is being memorized, it can be repeated in a way that deepens understanding ... the process of repetition contributes to understanding because different aspects of the text are in focus with each repetition, which is different from the mechanical memorization which characterizes rote learning. (p. 39)

The learning environment

The primacy of culture

The above serves as a reminder of the dangers inherent in embracing uncritically current fashion in methodology. This is of particular import in our encounters with traditions of learning which differ from those in which the methodology was conceived.

The primacy of the cultural context is expressed forcefully by Geertz, and Bruner (cited by Torff 1996).

> There is no such thing as human nature independent of culture. (Geertz 1983: 49)
>
> It is man's participation **in** culture and realization of his mental powers **through** culture that makes it impossible to construct a human psychology on the basis of the individual alone. (Bruner 1990: 12)

Researchers such as these have been profoundly influenced by the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky. For Vygotsky and other contextualists no effective teaching can take place unless account is taken of the cultural context and social interaction within that context. This points to the folly of attempting to impose a liberal, holistic view of the education process regardless of context. My own view is that a sound student–teacher relationship depends on the awareness and collusion of learners in the process at all stages.

I have found such an approach helpful in various situations, not least in my encounter in Vanuatu with a culture very different from my own. My work at the University of the South Pacific in that country introduced me to the ni-Vanuatu, a very reticent people with a high respect for tradition (revered as *kastom* in the local pidgin). My students were reluctant, sometimes it seemed unable, to question authority, be it the written text or the word of the teacher. This posed enormous challenges to a communicative approach to language teaching with its emphasis on student participation, not to mention my conviction of the value of an enquiring, problem-solving approach to learning. By a process of negotiation and learner training, however, my students acquired good learning habits, as well as skills and strategies which would serve them well in the longer term. I believe we succeeded in operating within what Skuttnab-Kangas and Philippson (cited in Ellis 1996: 217) refer to as an 'interculture' which combines 'compatible elements from both cultures'. This accommodation worked beautifully in the context of the Pacific Islands, where people are used to a tradition of give and take. In societies where to give way is to lose face, other solutions would have to be sought. It remains to be seen whether such an approach would be successful with students in Oman.

From theory to practice

Working at the intercultural interface

This then was the background to my attempt to introduce here a project-based, collaborative approach to the learning of English. My students were a group of post-graduates from the College of Arts who had been unable to find work since graduation two to three years previously. Their higher education to date had been provided largely through the medium of Arabic. The goal of these learners had been identified as gaining access to a global academic and business community; first and foremost this meant raising their skills level in English language. Prolonged

absence from study of the group in question, and a fairly low starting-base in English language, presented a twofold challenge.

From the outset I tried to harness the faith the students have in the teacher to encourage them to see class-based learning as a far more formative experience than they had come to expect. The first two weeks of the course were spent on materials and tasks entirely within the competence of the students, with a series of micro-assessments designed to build confidence and increase motivation. Thereafter they were gradually introduced to the notion of language learning as a process, and one in which they had some say. In line with the Vygotskyian notion of 'scaffolding', where both peers and teachers have an essential support role, learners were encouraged regularly to discuss their language problems, to check the work of their peers, and to assess not only their own contributions but also those of others; in short they were trained in identifying, and to some extent in analysing their own language production.

Again, in line with the Vygotskyian conception of language, one of my aims was to persuade my Omani students to see the English language as a tool, an enabling device, which can serve them in many different ways. The students were being encouraged to 'appropriate' the language (Kramsch and Sullivan 1996: 211), in a very simple way to use it as the great African writer Achebe does 'in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new (African) surroundings (cited in Bisong 1995: 129).

Project-based learning

Teachers know that one of the strengths of a task-based, project-based approach to language learning is that language is freed to assume its natural role of the medium rather than the message. It is my experience, too, that given the opportunity to work on a negotiated project, each student will approach the learning task in his/her own way; the teacher is there to guide, to offer alternatives, suggest, and discuss. In such a situation students are involved cognitively and meta-cognitively in a way which is difficult to replicate in a standard classroom setting.

Successful negotiation?

In negotiating the project it was necessary to ensure that every student was given a voice. One or two of the women found it difficult to talk in front of their male peers, and initially only one was prepared to counter the 'male' view (which itself was often expressed by only one or two of the more outspoken men). Once we had established a rapport over a two-week period I talked to the class in two groups, the men and the women separately, and outlined what I felt the project would achieve. I explained that together we could improve their language skills by means of researching a topic, and that through this research we would encounter the language of various genres and address the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. I then met with each student individually. None of these graduates had ever undertaken a project, and initially only one or two were enthusiastic. The greatest fear expressed by the majority was the need to work on their own outside the classroom. For many, this was something they never came to terms with. However, the project did go ahead. Students worked in groups of two or three on a topic of their own

choosing (again, something which some found problematic). We had two full-class teacher-fronted hours per week where the students were taken through each stage of the project, from the formulation of their research question, the search for information, the writing of questionnaires, etc. to the final written and oral presentations. They were encouraged to submit drafts at every stage, and small language 'clinics' were held to discuss any problems arising.

The venture was not a complete success. I suspect that from the group of 18 students, three or four of them never really saw the point of the whole exercise. Some found it very frustrating trying to mould their defective English into an acceptable form for interview or questionnaires (one student constantly complained he did not have 'enough grammar' for such an undertaking). The problem of plagiarism, especially from Internet sources, was perennial. In the end we compromised, and I allowed students to attach their sources, unamended, as appendices. (Two groups thus ended up with projects about six or seven pages in length with appendices three or four times longer.) For some of my students, however—I would estimate around 50%—the gains were considerable. These students presented written and oral projects of a very high standard, and their sense of achievement was very gratifying. Unfortunately, some other students remained throughout on the periphery. I would, however, venture to say that no single student excluded himself or herself entirely from the 'community of mutual learners'. I might also add that at no stage did I feel that my students viewed me as anything less than a 'real teacher'.

Conclusion

Education, by virtue of the fact that it has the potential for development, is a risky business. For this author the role of the teacher in this process is relatively clear. Neither our ideologies nor our methodologies should be force-fed to our students. It is rather the case that the teacher and the learner need to explore together the exciting possibilities at the cultural interface where, in my experience, the roles of teacher and learner become blurred, and a new relationship can be formed. This exploration of possibilities is part of the dynamic nature of the education process, and one which I attempted with my Omani students, in the hope of arriving at an accommodation workable by all. While concluding that the attempt was not entirely successful, either from the point of view of the teacher or the students, I trust that the lessons learnt will serve both my students and myself over the next few years.

My belief in a constructivist and culturally-sensitive approach remains intact.

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Appendix II

(Pages 156-161)

Forewarned is not necessarily forearmed: a language learning experience.

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Forewarned is not necessarily forearmed: a language learning experience

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In this article the experience of learning a new language is examined through the vehicle of a learner diary. The main conclusion reached is that, however experienced the learner, we, as teachers, should not lose sight of the overwhelming importance of non-linguistic and non-cognitive factors affecting the learning outcome.

INTRODUCTION

The critical self-examination implicit in reflective practice may be good for the soul, but we must be prepared to face up to what we find. This article describes a language learning experience which had all the makings of a success story: an enthusiastic learner surrounded by a native speaker community. That the attempt was conspicuously unsuccessful is the more surprising when we know that the learner is herself an experienced language teacher fluent in two foreign languages and conversant with three others. The experience is described and examined through the vehicle of a learner diary. Viewed from the perspective of one settled in the community and working as a teacher trainer, the anxieties and insecurities revealed in the learner diary below seem very remote. They were very real at the time.

RATIONALE

For many years now I have encouraged my students (of French and EFL) to keep a learner diary where they would log their experiences, comment on their approach and note any problems and frustrations as well as successes they achieved. I take the view with Bailey (1990), Chamot (1987) and Porter *et al.* (1990) that this is a valuable tool for developing the metalinguistic awareness of the learner while at the same time allowing the teacher an insight into the processes involved for each individual. In keeping with my views on the nature of the diary, this activity has always remained voluntary.

In January 1996 I came to Botswana. I decided to make an effort to learn the local language, Setswana, and to take my own advice and keep a diary. My purpose in keeping the learner diary was twofold. Firstly, I hoped it would help me to regain a learner perspective and enable me to better appreciate the experiences of my students and, secondly, I hoped to examine critically in the light of experience some of my own views on language learning and language learning strategies. I was aware at the outset that because of my experience and proven success as a language learner I was a somewhat atypical informant. I knew that I would find it difficult to separate my self as a learner from my self as a language teacher. The observer process would, therefore, be compromised by my professional self. I decided, nevertheless, that I could not simply jettison the backlog of accumulated theory about the nature of language learning; a certain amount of metacomment was sure to intrude. I did, however, make a conscious decision to concentrate on the process of learning and to try to leave the reflective aspect to a later date. In other words, to keep the diary separate from the diary study. I did not always succeed.

"The critical self-examination implicit in reflective practice may be good for the soul, but we must be prepared to face up to what we find"

THE LEARNER DIARY

The course I used was the only one available to me – *First steps in spoken Setswana* produced by Catholic missionaries in 1973 and reprinted in 1985. It consists of a book and set of audio-cassettes. The approach is a very traditional one. Each lesson begins with an exposition of points of grammar, followed by a list of vocabulary. The backbone of the method is sentence manipulation and substitution drills. These are also produced on tape. My intention was to study, using this course for one to two hours every day, Monday to Friday. I would adhere to the methodology of the case study and note any observations, reflections, frustrations as they occurred. As I was staying in a hotel at this time awaiting the allocation of a

house, I was surrounded by Setswana speakers. I intended to make the most of this opportunity to practise what I learned on native speakers. The diary covers a period of five weeks.

Francistown, Botswana

7/2/96

Lesson one begins like the old course books – two lists of nouns, singular and plural, and the command "learn these nouns". They are pronounced on tape so at least that's an improvement on some courses. This takes me back to school where I spent hours learning lists just like this. Find myself resorting to the same old technique of writing and re-writing the noun to be learned and its English translation. Depressingly difficult – covering up each side alternately in an effort to recall meaning... Find I can remember the vocabulary better if it's in a short Q and A dialogue. Am resorting to a tremendous amount of translation. I can see that with the short dialogues and perhaps even with the drills, a bout of group work at this stage would help.

8/2

Astonishing how I have to fight to start again – feel as though I remember very little from yesterday – mustn't fall into the trap of the perpetual false beginner. I have to trust that the course has built-in revision. This course would be impossible without the tapes. Find the drills useful. They match the way I originally learned French and German, but what I wouldn't give for an opportunity to practise them in an authentic, or perhaps even better, a simulated authentic (i.e. group learner) session. Find it helpful to write the translation exercises at the end of the lesson – rather than just say and check.

"Astonishing how I have to fight to start again – feel as though I remember very little from yesterday – mustn't fall into the trap of the perpetual false beginner"

9/2

Faced again with a list of vocab - verbs this time. What is the best way to go about learning these lists? Find I resort to the time-consuming, not very profitable, system of copying them out. Chanting aloud helps, particularly rhythmic chanting. Feel good when I recognise the verb "thusa" has the same root as the noun "mothusi"... wonder if a rule is emerging here. These little successes go a long way to helping motivation.

Don't Setswana verbs conjugate? What a great bonus if this is the case.

What a lot of words to learn. I really begin to appreciate the learner's need for reward and reinforcement. If I as a skilled language learner encounter this feeling of helplessness...? It can be really daunting not to have the tools to say the simplest things... I'm coping at this level of mechanical substitution; comprehension is coming along provided I have enough time to retrieve each word individually. Production is painfully slow and I could kick myself for some of the mistakes I make.

10/2

Just when you think you're getting somewhere ...! I study the dialogues and in written form I can translate most of them. Listening to the artificially slow dialogue on tape I have few problems BUT now we are introduced to elision with the question form and the dialogue starts to speed up. I recognise the need to be introduced to authentic speech a.s.a.p. otherwise I'm going to feel cheated when confronted with real-life situations.

Gave up after 10 mins... intend to come back to it later today... need to be more disciplined.

12/2

Have to complete lesson 2 before moving on. Find myself engaging in voluntary sentence manipulation. Convinces me even more that students need to be given wherewithal to manipulate and create sentences of their own, to experiment. ...need to be made aware of structure at an early stage.

Completed lessons 2 and 3. Wonderful to meet English words which have been "customised" to fit in with syntax and pronunciation patterns of another language - Pêtêrolê (petrol), nnêsê (nurse) etc.

15/2

... I know I need to get out and practise some of these structures and phrases on real people. Hard to motivate myself working on my own.

16/2

... Drills are becoming boring. I've established I'm good at them but are they good at teaching me Setswana? Have always believed they're good as back up ... are they transferable to productive language? Possibly effective means of reinforcing grammar?

Have practically given up on the writing and re-writing of vocabulary. Now do it perhaps once to establish it visually in my memory, then recite it a few times and am happy to wait till I meet it and therefore establish the need to know.

20/2

Glad to have got hold of Anna's (my daughter's) school notebook with some useful conversational phrases. I'm certainly becoming an expert at language drills – do them without any thought as to their meaning – is this a valid language learning strategy?

... I feel frustrated – I'm not achieving any fluency. This method, while possibly building strong groundwork for the future, does not offer the necessary gratification for the learner. I need to feel I can converse confidently at a basic level. More interaction is needed – even the drills could involve more question and answer.

5/3

Half hour revision of Chapter 4a. It's coming back

after the long (two week) absence. This makes me feel good and helps motivation – but Lord, how do you present vocab in a way that doesn't put the student off? These long lists are so depressing.

6/3
One area where I can definitely perceive progress is listening. The apparently fallow period over the last two weeks has perhaps not been totally unproductive. The sounds no longer seem alien to me. I can understand more readily what's being said on tape. I'm becoming more accustomed to rhythm and intonation. I think my pronunciation is improving too. I know in a real situation I'll fall to pieces but there is light at the end of the tunnel. Must take the opportunity to practise.

11/3
Did half an hour – will try to get back to it later today.

12/3
Tackled sentence manipulation – pleased with progress in grammar.

13/3
Introduction to the future – don't feel ready...

The learner diary comes to a somewhat abrupt end here, as did my efforts at learning Setswana. I felt totally demotivated and can blame only partially the method and the materials.

REFLECTIONS

My stated aims at the outset had been to "regain a learner perspective ... and ... to examine critically some of my own views on language learning". On re-reading the diary I am immediately struck by the somewhat regressive strategic approach I adopted initially. For the first two or three days I resorted almost exclusively to the techniques I had used when learning French and German at school: compulsively writing everything down, checking, chanting, translating. It was as though the subsequent thirty years' experience of language learning and teaching had never intervened. It is often noted that learning a language, perhaps more than learning any other skill, puts the learner in a position of utter helplessness, deprived of the means to fulfil that most basic of human needs, the need to communicate. This may explain my retreat into a method which, while known by my adult and professional self to be inefficient, nevertheless held the comfort of the tried and tested – after all, it had worked for me all those years ago.

Despite acknowledging on the first day that vocabulary learning was easier when presented in the form of a short dialogue, in other words given some kind of context, it was not until day 7 (16/2) that I finally abandoned this procedure: "Have practically given up on the writing and re-writing of vocabulary. Now do it perhaps once to establish it visually in my memory, then recite it a few times and am happy to wait till I meet it and therefore establish the need to know." I must stress here that I do not doubt the validity of the strategies of imitation and repetition. However, my belief is that they are of value when they involve imitating and repeating meaningful language and not a series of individual words out of context. I had stopped presenting my own students with these long, uncontextualised strings of words and phrases years ago and had always encouraged them to establish a personalised list. Whatever the explanation for my own regressive behaviour, I eventually acknowledged that progress with vocabulary learning was made only when I had rejected this infantile approach and sought to learn new words and phrases in context.

While I dismissed eventually as time-consuming and relatively unproductive the task of writing and rewriting vocabulary lists, my entry of 8/2 reveals that I found it helpful to write the translation exercises at the end of each lesson. With the ascendancy of Communicative Language Teaching, the skill of writing, it may be argued, has been somewhat neglected. There may be some justification for seeing it perhaps as the least "useful" of the four skills in that it is the least "used"; few of even the most proficient language learners are called upon to write more than occasionally in the foreign language. Nevertheless, while I would agree that the art of creative writing should perhaps take relatively low priority for the majority, I regret the neglect of writing as a support for the other skills. Acquaintance with the orthography of a language helps our knowledge of form and function, while what Peter Wingard (1981:147) calls "selective meaningful copying" offers useful practice in the early stages. In my case I found that the copying of dialogue, for example, helped me with the spoken register. I have never been comfortable with the tendency of many course writers and teachers to treat reading, writing, listening and speaking as four discrete skills and to select tasks and assessment procedures accordingly. In real-life language situations there is a constant overlap between receptive and productive activity. Recognition of this occurs again in my diary entry of 6/3 where the acknowledgement that my pronunciation is improving immediately follows on recognition of progress in my listening skills; a connection between the two is implied. Separating the four language skills may make for a neat teaching or assessment schedule but it does not reflect the reality of how language works.

"progress with vocabulary learning was made only when I sought to learn new words and phrases in context"

I was surprised on rereading the diary to discover the extensive use I made of translation. The course itself leaned heavily on the technique but I felt quite comfortable with it. The prevalence of the term mother tongue "interference'" in the

language teaching literature of the 60s and 70s reveals a perception of the mother tongue as an almost entirely negative influence. In fact I found comparison with my native language and indeed foreign languages with which I am acquainted to be a positive factor. We cannot simply pretend that mother tongue knowledge does not impinge on foreign language learning. I have always preferred to make students aware of it and use it to their advantage. A heightened awareness of the language process as a whole, including the place of the mother tongue, can be an empowering and highly motivating experience for students. My own experience supports this entirely.

There is no doubt that past experience has an effect (positive and negative) on how we approach a new language. Previous knowledge, gained through the study of our own language or another native language, is invaluable. I found myself seeking patterns in Setswana, as well as similarities with other languages I know. I was constantly on the lookout for grammatical and morphological features, and was delighted every time I came across an English word "customised" for use in Setswana (12/2 – *pêtêrolê, nnêsê* etc.). Ausubel (cited in Brown and Atkins (1988:150)) sees the application of a learner's previous knowledge as the overriding factor in learner success: "The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly." Rubin (1987) cites "inductive inferencing" or the use of prior knowledge, linguistic, conceptual or contextual, as one of the major language learning strategies. And the failure to apply previous knowledge is seen by some researchers as a major contribution to lack of success in language learning. Grenfell and Harris (1993:25) cite this as one of the major failings of secondary school pupils learning a foreign language in the UK: "The problems observed in relation to making sense of the target language arose often from pupils' assumption that none of their existing knowledge could be relevant to the target language. Hence, for example, they failed to look out for cognates, to use pictures to support their understanding and instructions. They sometimes overlooked obvious clues like the existence of an example."

"I found comparison with my native language and indeed foreign languages with which I am acquainted to be a positive factor"

Of all the technological aids to language learning introduced this century the most revolutionary has surely been the simple tape recorder. Nothing since has done so much to change the way in which we learn a language. My Setswana course was intended for learners in-country, surrounded by native speakers, but had it not been for some of the dialogues recorded on tape I might have been studying a dead language. Within the first week I could declaim with confidence, "The shepherds are calling the ministers" or "The industrious person (*sic*) knows Setswana"; I suspected this would not be of much help in engaging in conversation with the average Motswana. However, when I was listening to, imitating and responding to native speakers on tape, even when I knew the language content was extremely contrived, I felt some progress was being made. I was relieved, however, to be able to use the notes of my daughter who had started to learn conversational Setswana at school. I recognised the need to be introduced to authentic speech as soon as possible (10/2). Perhaps this reflects the painful memories of arriving in France after six years as an "A" student of French at school and finding I understood practically nothing of what was said to me.

It must be evident to the reader that, given the circumstances of the learning experience and the nature of the learner, the odds on a successful attempt at language learning were apparently pretty good. It must be equally evident that the end result was conspicuously unsuccessful. Motivation levels, both instrumental and integrative[1], were very high at the outset. What went wrong?

Once I had abandoned the regressive tactics described earlier, the strategic approach I adopted stands up well to examination in the light of Rubin's (1987) typology of strategies of the good language learner. I have already highlighted my use of "inductive inferencing". Examples can be found of the remaining cognitive learning strategies cited by Rubin – clarification, deductive reasoning, practice, memorisation and monitoring. Conspicuous by their absence, however, are any attempts to employ what she calls social or communication strategies. I failed entirely to seek out opportunities for target language use and consequently found no occasion to implement the communication strategies such as circumlocution, mime etc., so invaluable in a natural second or foreign language situation. For all the use I made of the native speaker community outside my front door, I might as well have been learning Setswana at home in Scotland.

The irony of the entry on Day 2 of my journal was not entirely lost on me even at the time: "what I wouldn't give for an opportunity to practise ... in an authentic, or perhaps even better, a simulated authentic (i.e. group learner) session." I blush at the insecurity inherent in that statement. All the time my professional self was urging me to overcome this absurd situation.

The entry of 10/2 finds me acknowledging the need to be introduced as soon as possible to authentic speech. Subsequent entries reveal the guilt of one who knows what needs to be done but cannot find the wherewithal to do it. On 15/2 I wrote, "I know I need to get out and practise some of these structures and phrases on real people", on 20/2 "I need to feel I can converse confidently at a basic level." "More interaction is needed," "Must take the opportunity to practise", I urged myself on 6/3.

The very proximity of the target language community was working against me; I was

suffering from a bad case of what Rivers (1983:148) calls *anomie*, "a feeling of uncertainty about one's place and one's loyalties in a new situation." Furthermore, the most basic levels of needs in Maslow's need-hierarchy theory[2] were not being met. My domestic situation was highly irregular; we were living in a hotel, my daughter was unwell, and I was exhibiting characteristics said by Schumann and Schumann (quoted in Ellis: 1985:100) to adversely affect the learning process. These are "nesting patterns" or the need for an orderly home situation, and "transition anxiety", the stress generated by the move to a foreign environment.

I found it impossible to bridge that vital "social and psychological distance between a learner and the target community" viewed by Little (1989:20) as being "of critical importance in determining the degree of proficiency which the learner will achieve in the language in question." Consequently, I was unable to satisfy the need of every débutant language learner for a sympathetic interlocutor, and my wish to communicate slowly receded.

CONCLUSION

For me, the major insight gained from these reflections is the overwhelming importance of non-linguistic and non-cognitive factors affecting the learning outcome, in particular the primacy of motivation.

The emphasis in language teaching over the last twenty years on communicative competence has brought motivational affect to the top of the agenda. While all subject areas have conceded the more participatory role of the learner, in no other field is this such a central requirement as in the field of language learning. The student of a language is required to engage his/her whole personality in the learning process. The complexity and fragility of that personality must be conceded. If this is true for an experienced teacher/learner of languages, how much more must we acknowledge its import in the case of our classroom learners?

All learners, even the most experienced, must be made to feel at ease with their environment, with the teacher and with the peer group, and have their fears and inhibitions taken seriously.

NOTES

[1]Gardner and Lambert (1972) divided motivational factors with two categories which they termed *instrumental* and *integrative*. The former refers to motivation driven by pragmatic or functional goals, the passing of exams or furthering of career opportunities, for example, while the latter encompasses a strong desire to communicate and to identify with the L2 community.

[2]Maslow (cited in Biesheuvel 1984:47–51) posits a hierarchy of needs and asserts that there are "pre-potency relationships between the levels, i.e. that the higher-level needs, for self-esteem and self-actualisation, cannot be fulfilled until the lower ones, for nourishment and security, for example, have been met."

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"the overwhelming importance of non-linguistic and non-cognitive factors affecting the learning outcome, in particular the primacy of motivation"

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